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Massachusetts School Council Handbook

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Massachusetts school council handbook

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Massachusetts Department of Education

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Statement from the Commissioner of Education

Dear School Council Members and Other Interested Parties:

As we enter the second phase of Education Reform, the role of school councils becomes even more important. School councils provide a great opportunity for community partners, parents, teachers, and principals to come together both to share ideas and resources and to shape the direction their schools will take to strengthen teaching and learning. Over the past several years, I have heard inspirational stories from parents, teachers, and principals about the accomplishments and support their schools realized through the benefit of shared decision-making. This handbook is designed to assist you in your school's efforts to improve student performance.

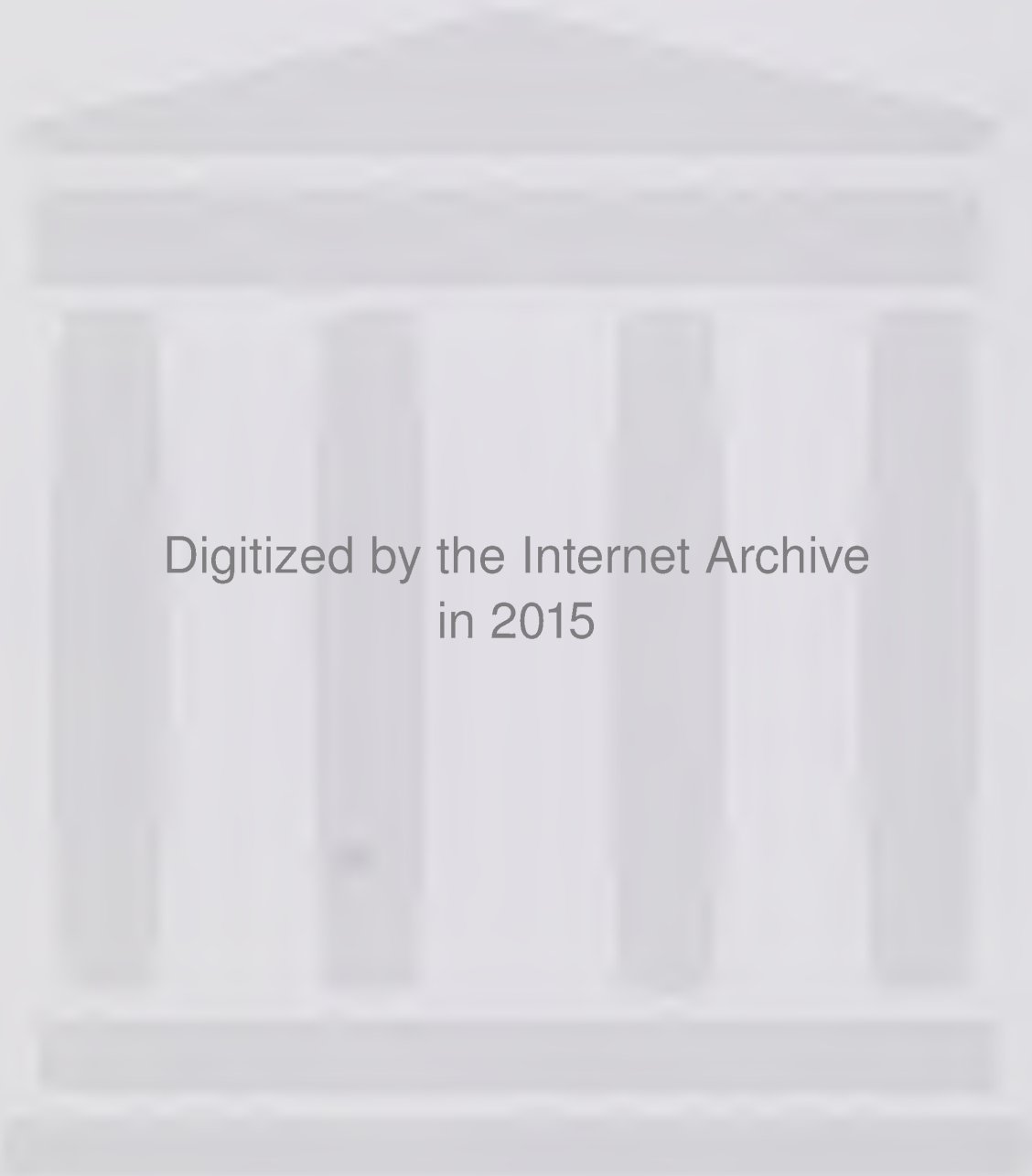
Nowhere is the role of the school councils more important than in the development of the school improvement plan. Under the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System established by the Department of Education in 1999, school improvement plans become an essential tool in the evaluation of district and school performance. The new Recertification Regulations require educators to develop professional development plans that are aligned with their school and district improvement plans. These developments promote coordination in goal setting and planning, bringing the entire school community together in their efforts to improve student achievement.

We are pleased to announce that we have established a school council web site, www.doe.mass.edu/schcouncil, in addition to this handbook, as a source for the latest educational information, news, and resources for council members. I hope these resources will be helpful to school councils as they carry on the important work of planning for continual improvement in achievement and educational success for all our students.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

NOTES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Foreword

The Massachusetts School Council Handbook is an expanded update of the *1994 Questions and Answers on School Councils*. It has been developed with the help of the Massachusetts Parent and Community Involvement Council, school council members from across the state, and Department of Education staff from Accountability and Targeted Assistance, School and Community Partnerships and the Massachusetts Parent Involvement Project.

A number of changes have taken place since the *Questions and Answers on School Councils* was issued in 1994. While this handbook contains much of the same information in that Q&A, you will also find new questions and answers, council anecdotes, and comments from the field. In addition, the content has been reorganized and condensed for increased readability. We hope *The Massachusetts School Council Handbook* will be a valuable resource as you work to support your school in planning for and implementing improvement.

The Massachusetts Department of Education would like to thank Karen DeCoster, Associate Executive Director, Commissioner's Office, Ann Hess, Special Assistant to the Board, and Joseph Andelman, Youth Tech Entrepreneurs (YTE) intern, for their work in developing and preparing this handbook. We would also like to thank the many educators, students, parents, and community members who have enhanced this document with their personal anecdotes, quotes, and recommendations.

This document and all Department documents and publications are available on our Internet site on the World Wide Web: www.doe.mass.edu. By accessing the document via our web site, you will find direct links to DOE resources relevant to school improvement planning for student achievement.

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Part One: An Overview

*(*Bold print has been added for increased focus.)*

School councils are the part of the Education Reform Law of 1993 that best ensures the meaningful involvement of parents and community members. In that regard, I consider it to be one of the most important provisions of the law and one that schools need to implement aggressively. For all the hard work of educators, if we do not engage and involve parents and the community in our overall success will be limited.

David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

A. The Law

Chapter 71: Section 59C. School councils; members; meetings; duties.

Section 59C. At each public elementary, secondary and independent vocational school in the commonwealth there shall be a school council consisting of the school principal, who shall co-chair the council; parents of students attending the school who shall be selected by the parents of students attending such school who will be chosen in elections held by the local recognized parent teacher organization under the direction of the principal, or if none exists, chosen by a representative process approved by the school committee. Said parents shall have parity with professional personnel on the school councils; teachers who shall be selected by the teachers in such school; other persons, not parents or teachers of students at the school, drawn from such groups or entities as municipal government, business and labor organizations, institutions of higher education, human services agencies or other interested groups including those from school age child care programs; and for schools containing any of the grades nine to twelve, at least one such student; provided, however, that not more that fifty percent of the council shall be non-school members. The principal, except as otherwise provided herein, shall have the responsibility for defining the composition of and forming the group pursuant to a representative process approved by the superintendent and school committee and for convening the first meeting no later than forty days after the first day of school, at which meeting a co-chairman shall be selected. School councils should be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community. For purposes of this paragraph the term "non-school members" shall mean those members of the council, other than parents, teachers, students and staff of the school.

Nothing contained in this section shall require a new school council to be formed if an existing school council fulfills the intent of this section, the parent and teacher members thereof were selected in a manner consistent with the provisions of this section and the membership thereof complies with the aforesaid fifty percent requirement.

Meetings of the school council shall be subject to the provisions of sections twenty-three A, twenty-three B and twenty-three C of chapter thirty-nine[the open meeting law].

The school council, including the school principal, shall meet regularly and shall assist in the identification of the educational needs of the students attending the school, make recommendations to the principal for the development, implementation and assessment of the curriculum accommodation plan required pursuant to section 38Q1/2, shall assist in the review of the annual school budget and in the formulation of a school improvement plan, as provided below.

The principal of each school, in consultation with the school council established pursuant to this section shall adopt educational goals for the schools consistent with the goals and standards including the student performance standards, adopted by the board pursuant to section one D of chapter sixty-nine, and consistent with any educational policies established for the district, shall assess the needs of the school in light of those goals, and shall formulate a school improvement plan to advance such goals, to address such needs and to improve student performance. The plan shall include an assessment of the impact of class size on student performance, and shall consider student to teacher ratios and other factors and supportive adult resources, and may include a scheduled plan for reducing class size. The plan shall address professional development for the school's professional staff, the allocation of any professional development funds in the annual school budget, the enhancement of parental involvement in the life of the school, safety and discipline, the establishment of a welcoming

Councils can access valuable information via the Internet. Ask a council member to serve as a "web ambassador" visiting the DOE web site regularly at www.doe.mass.edu for the latest information on policies, program, and grant opportunities. If your school has a web site, visit it too and see that it is up-dated, often.

school environment characterized by tolerance and respect for all groups, extracurricular activities, the development of means for meeting the diverse learning needs of as many children as possible, including children with special needs currently assigned to separate programs, within the regular education programs at the school, and such further subjects as the principal, in consultation with the school council, shall consider appropriate. In school districts with language minority student populations the professional development plan under this section shall specify how the plan will address the need for training and skills in second language acquisition and in working with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. Each school improvement plan shall be submitted to the school committee for review and approval every year. If said school improvement plan is not reviewed by the school committee within thirty days of said school committee receiving said school improvement plan, the plan shall be deemed to have been approved.

Nothing contained in this section shall prevent the school committee from granting a school council additional authority in the area of educational policy; provided, however, that school councils shall have no authority over matters which are subject to chapter one hundred and fifty E [collective bargaining].

As a member of the Parent and Community Involvement Advisory Council, I chose to attend a local council meeting to get a picture of shared decision-making. I went to a meeting at Somerville High School where I found a dedicated and well-informed group of parents, school staff, and community members actively working to foster and promote education reform. It was exciting to see site-based management working in my own district.

Grace Healey
P&C Council Co-Chair

The following Massachusetts statutes are also related to school councils. They have been included in the appendix for your consideration and review.

- Chapter 39: Section 23B. Open meetings of governmental bodies.
- Chapter 71: Section 37H. Policies relative to conduct of teachers or students; student handbooks.
- Chapter 71: Section 38Q. Professional development plans; statewide assistance plan.

B. General Questions

1. Which schools are required to establish a school council?

The law requires that there be a school council "at each public elementary, secondary, and independent vocational school in the Commonwealth." Charter schools are exempt from the school council mandate, because of their unique governance structure. Under the charter school law, G.L. c. 71, s. 89: "Notwithstanding section 59C, the internal form of governance of a charter school shall be determined by the school's charter."

2. What are the main areas of responsibility for school councils?

G.L. c.71, s.59C states that: "The school council shall **meet regularly with the principal** of the school and shall **assist in the identification of the educational needs of students** [...], in the **review of the annual school budget**, and in the **formulation of a school improvement plan**." In addition under G.L. c.71, s.37H, "In each school building containing the grades nine to twelve, inclusive, the principal, in consultation with the school council, **shall prepare and distribute to each student a student handbook** setting forth the rules pertaining to the conduct of students."

3. What is meant by " the school council [...] shall assist?"

The school council is an advisory body that works together to provide ideas and opinions to help the principal. In this context, council members assist by:

- *providing information and recommendations relevant to the educational needs of students;*
- *reading and discussing the budget with the principal to understand the implications for goals and activities in the school improvement plan; and*
- *participating actively in the process of analysis and planning that results in the identification of annual goals, activities, outcomes, and resources that will lead to school improvement.*

A council's review of the budget informs the council in planning activities that require funding. In school districts that encourage building-based budget planning, a school's improvement plan for one year can guide the development of the school's budget for the next.

1994 *Questions and Answers on School Councils*

4. May councils make recommendations concerning district-wide policies or other schools in the district?

Yes. School councils may make non-binding recommendations to school committees on issues that are of great interest to the school and that have district-wide implications. In addition, school committees may give additional responsibilities to councils through the provision of the law that reads: **"Nothing contained in this section shall prevent the school committee from granting a school council additional authority in the area of educational policy, other than matters subject to collective bargaining."**

5. What are some areas in which councils cannot be involved?

School councils may not: (1) be involved in the day to day process of management of the school; (2) permit special interests to dominate the agenda; (3) go beyond an advisory role without the permission of the principal and school committee; nor (4) **assume authority on** matters covered by Chapter 15OE of the General Laws. *

* Chapter 150E governs labor relations and collective bargaining for public employees including teacher contracts. This provision leaves such issues as compensation, workload, conditions of work, and employee evaluation procedures subject to collective bargaining.

C. Vision

1. What are school councils and why were they established?

School councils are representative advisory groups that collaborate in planning for and implementing school improvement. They are a form of *site-based management* that places the school at the center of planning, goal setting, and budgeting for improvement. Councils may take on other responsibilities including policy-making, but only as granted by the local school committee.

> As education becomes an increasingly complex undertaking, it is important that educators and the public see themselves as collaborators. It makes sense to encourage internal and external ownership if we hope to reach our goals. If not, we administrators face the danger of people working against us rather than with us. In today's educational climate, consensus is key.
>
> *Marilyn Fratturelli, Assistant Superintendent, Leominster Public Schools*

School councils were established to assist principals in planning for and implementing goals and practices that enhance the achievement of all students. They are the main instruments for practicing the site-based decision making called for in the 1993 Education Reform Act.

2. What is site based management?

A school council is one form of site based management. Site based management has three main features:

- Formal **authority is delegated** to principals or distributed among principals, teachers, parents, and others at the school site. A formal structure (e.g., council, committee, team, or board) is created so that a broad array of participants can be involved in decision making.
- There is **recognized authority** for making decisions.
- The **authority is defined** although limited by law and contractual agreements.

3. What are the educational benefits of site based management?

Students, parents, educators, and community members become more committed to improving and supporting their school when they have an opportunity to serve or be represented on a council with a role in shaping the direction their school might take.

Who benefits?	How?
Students gain...	• Additional support and opportunities for achievement • Value/respect for education through observed involvement • For student representatives, an opportunity to shape policy decisions
Parents gain...	• An opportunity to shape policy decisions • An opportunity to redefine parent involvement • A better understanding of the school's possibilities and challenges
Community members gain...	• An opportunity to shape policy decisions • An opportunity to redefine community involvement • Increased value, awareness, and access of community resource(s)
Educators gain...	• An opportunity to shape policy decisions • Increased public confidence and mutual support • Added insight re: community perceptions and expectations • A better understanding of the school's possibilities and challenges

> I truly feel that when councils focus on the students, effective teams and supportive relationships are established. I value the work our council has done in creating a vision, setting goals, and solving problems.
>
> *Nancy Bouthilette, Principal Russell Elementary School*

4. What are the key responsibilities of a council in Phase II of Education Reform?

The primary responsibility of the school council is, as it has been from its inception, to work with the principal to develop a sound plan for school improvement. The school improvement plan is at the heart of Education Reform, and it is a key component of the School and District Accountability System established by the Board of Education in 1999. The school council brings together the expertise of educators, parents, and community members to review data available from MCAS reports and other sources, and together with the principal, it develops a plan to address identified needs and improve the performance of students in the school.

Additionally, the connection between the school improvement plan and the professional development for educators within the school has been strengthened as a result of the 1999 amendment to the Recertification Regulations. The regulations require educators to design individual professional development plans for themselves that are aligned with the educational improvement goals of the school and the district. When the school improvement plan is sound, and the teachers and other educators within the school align their individual professional development plans with it, then all can work better together to improve student learning.

> School councils ask principals to rethink the traditional model in which administrators make policy, teachers deliver instruction, and parents provide support. On an effective council the principal truly involves those closest to the students, teachers and parents, in identifying priorities and strategies for improvement.
>
> *Colleen Tuson, Parent Liaison*
> *MA Parent Involvement Project*

D. Representation and Participation

1. What is the school's responsibility for establishing councils that are broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school community?

The law reads "school councils **should be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity** of the school building and the community." Schools have a affirmative responsibility to ensure there are opportunities for all racial and ethnic groups to participate in the council. This responsibility may not involve setting quotas or developing proportional representation plans that guarantee seats on the council to members of particular racial or ethnic groups. There are, however, several strategies schools can use to enhance broad representation:

- Request existing parent groups to nominate candidates from their membership.
- Hold elections at the conclusion or beginning of a cultural assembly program, school play, open-house, or other event that brings a large number of parents into the school.
- Solicit nominations for parent and community members through strategic mailing and postings in community organizations, local newspapers, and radio and cable television announcements.
- Invite parents to nominate themselves or others for membership on the council. (This approach has been highly successful in generating candidates.)

We hold a fall welcome program, attended by roughly 75% of our families, in late September. At that time, we introduce our school council candidates and request those in attendance to vote for their council representatives. Family members who cannot attend this program are encouraged to return the ballot found in our first newsletter.

Raymond O'Malley, Principal, Parker Middle School Taunton

2. In order to enhance representation, may parents and teachers be elected by "subgroups" within the parent or teacher community?

Initiated by a council member, the Brimfield Elementary School Advisory Council added improvement of the school library/media center as an annual goal. A subcommittee was created which included the principal, school librarian, school council member, and a number of parents. This subcommittee surveyed parents, teachers, and students on library usage, preferences, and needs; developed specific goals and objectives for the library/media center; performed a thorough "weeding" of the school library; and secured funding for new books, periodicals, and software for the library.

Mike DeFalco, Brimfield School Committee

No. The election of parents and teachers must, by law, be open to all parents and teachers, respectively. However, to encourage representation from underrepresented parent or teacher groups, the nomination process may be designed to yield candidates from certain "subgroups." For example, if a citywide school lacks parent representation from certain regions of the city, or teachers from a particular grade level, the principal may solicit nominations from such "sub groups". However, all parents or teachers must be able to vote for all parents or teachers including candidates who wish to run "at-large." In other words, a council may not have "reserved" seats for subgroups of either the teacher or the parent population.

3. How can school councils become more inclusive in their decision making?

Inclusive decision making refers to a way of doing business that provides for continual contact between the council and the school community it represents. Councils can become more inclusive by:

- Exceeding the requirements of the open meeting law by giving more notice of the time and place than the law requires and including the agenda in such posted notice. Include meeting times and locations in the parent newsletter.
- Providing for a public comment period at every council meeting. During this period, council members and the school community at large may bring their issues to the attention of the council. The ground rules for

such sessions should rule out individual grievances (e.g., a parent's complaint about a class placement) and personnel issues requiring confidentiality.

- Setting aside the last few minutes of each council meeting to develop the agenda for the next meeting. In this way, council members can informally canvass the thoughts and opinions of the constituents they represent in between meetings.

- Establishing subcommittees with additional membership. This practice brings one or more members of the council together with other volunteers from the school and community to work on a specific issue for a specific period of time. This also provides an opportunity for involvement of parents, teachers, and community members who do not have the time or interest to serve on a permanent standing committee.

- Hold meetings at a time and place when parents and others are more likely to attend.

4. <u>If the school council surveys parents, teachers, or others about issues related to school improvement, are the survey results available to the public?</u>

Yes. Under the Public Records Law*, documents made or received by a state or local government agency, including a school council, are public records, unless they fall within one of the exemptions specified in the law. For example, memos or letters relating to policy positions still being developed by the agency are exempt, but "reasonably completed factual studies or reports on which the development of such policy positions has been or may be based" are public records. The final survey results would be a public record, available to any person upon request.

*For more information on the Public Records Law, including a definition of "public records" see G.L. c. 4, s. 7 and c. 66, s. 10, at www.state.ma.us/law.

Part Two: Establishing and Maintaining Effective Councils

A. General Expectations

1. What are the responsibilities of council membership?

In order to work in consultation with the school principal to adopt educational goals and plan for school improvement, council members are expected to:

- ❖ focus on the interests of the school and all it s students;
- ❖ stay informed on issues that affect student success and achievement;
- ❖ attend and participate regularly in council meetings;
- ❖ communicate regularly with the population they represent (faculty, parents, community, students);
- ❖ promote the participation of the school community in support of the improvement plan;
- ❖ attend workshops and training programs for council members; and
- ❖ seek to reach consensus in the decision making process of the council.

> [S]uccessful school improvement planning is a collaborative process that includes all those who are committed to education: administrators, teachers, parents, students, and support staff. Active participation of all individuals enhances school improvement efforts.
>
> *Bobbie D'Alessandro*
> *Superintendent,*
> *Cambridge*

2. Who should serve on a school council?

A council is **composed of elected and appointed representatives** of the school and community. The law specifies that the council is to consist of: **(1)** parents of students attending the school; **(2)** teachers; and **(3)** other persons drawn from such groups or entities as municipal government, business and labor organizations, institutions of higher education, human service agencies or other interested groups, including those from school-age child care programs. For schools containing any of grades nine to twelve, there should be **(4)** at least one student on the council.

3. How many members should the council contain?

The law leaves it up to each principal to define the size and composition of the council. It does, however, make three stipulations about membership:

> One of the strengths I see on our school council is the diversity of the group—parents, teachers, and students coming together to assist the school. A strong leader should know when a certain voice is not being heard and prompt for their input. I think this kind of leadership is critical in group work.
>
> *Vimal Vora, Wayland High School, Class of '99*

- ❖ Parents "shall have **parity** [equality] with professional personnel on the school councils." Regardless of the size of the council, **the number of parent representatives must be equal to the number of professional school personnel** who serve on the council that is, teachers plus the principal. For example, if a council has three teachers and one principal (i.e., 3 + 1=4 professional educators) there must be four parent representatives for parity.

- ❖ **"Not more than fifty percent of the council shall be non-school members."** Non-school members are defined as members who are "other than parents, teachers, students, and staff at the school" (e.g., local business partners, representatives from community based organizations, higher education partners). In the example above, the council has eight *school members* (i.e., 4 professional educators + 4 parents). If two high school students were added, there would be ten school members (i.e., 3 teachers + 1 principal + 4 parents + 2 students = 10). Accordingly, the number of *non-school members* could not exceed ten.

- ❖ The membership of school councils (teachers, parents, and others) "**should be broadly representative** of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community."

4. What is the reason for parity in representation between parents and school professionals?

Research on small group dynamics has shown that when lay people are outnumbered they are less likely to communicate their special perspective. "Parity" provides a critical mass in which parents can feel comfortable expressing their views while educators retain a strong voice on the council.

5. Are the composition, role, and functions of the school council subject to collective bargaining?

To the extent that the composition, role, and functions of the school council are defined by statute, those matters are not subject to collective bargaining.

6. May a school council designate co-chairs without having the principal serve as a co-chair?

No. The law requires that the school principal be one of the co-chairs of the council. The council, as a whole, selects the other co-chair(s). The prefix "co" means together, in conjunction with, or jointly. While it is most common for the principal and one other person to share the duties of chairing a school council, a council could decide to have more than two representative co-chairs (e.g., one administrator, one teacher, one parent). An interesting school council model in the Boston Public Schools involves not two but three co-chairs: the principal, a teacher, and a parent. Co-chairs rotate chairing the meeting and setting the agenda.

When a parent serves as co-chair on the school council other parents contribute more at the council meetings. In addition, from such a close up view parents see the challenges that school administrators face in planning for improvement.

Charles Curry, Co-Chair
Bennett School Council, Taunton

7. Is it a requirement that parents serve as co-chair with the principal?

No. Although this is common practice among school councils, it is not a requirement. The council is to elect the other co-chair from those members expressing an interest in serving in this capacity. In the spirit of maintaining parity, councils may wish to encourage parents to serve as co-chairs.

8. What is the recommended term of office for council members?

There are two major considerations to weigh in regard to the length of council members' terms: (1) the value of continuity and experience with long term membership and (2) the value of fresh perspectives and increased participation with a greater turnover of members.

Establishing staggered terms for members of councils can provide both continuity and fresh perspective (i.e., one third of each membership category is elected for terms of one, two, and three years in the initial year of the council). These members can be re-elected for a full three-year term when their term expires.

Be sure to consider membership limitations when establishing terms. For example, while there is no statute-based limitation placed on teachers' or community members' terms, parents must have a child attending the school in order to serve on the council each year.

1994 Questions and Answers on School Councils

9. Are school council members "public officials" and, as such, subject to conflict of interest provisions?

Yes. According to the State Ethics Commission's Opinion EC-COI-93-21 (October 19, 1993), school councils are considered municipal agencies and their members, although they serve without compensation, are considered municipal employees for purposes of the conflict of interest law. This provision may be especially relevant to parent and community members of councils who may serve on other municipal agencies, boards and commissions within the community or who may do business with the city or town agencies.

Because the circumstances of each case are different, the Department suggests that conflict of interest questions be directed to the State Ethics Commission, One Ashburton Place, Room 619, Boston, MA 02108. Telephone: (617) 727-0060.

FAX: (617) 723-5851.

B. Elections

School councils aim to help schools enhance the achievement of all students. As first-hand resources, student members offer an essential perspective to this end. Through their input and involvement in decision-making, student members increase the council's ability to draft and implement effective school improvement.

Rachelle Engler
Director, Office of Student Leadership, MA Department of Education

1. How are members to be selected?

The law indicates that the principal "shall have the responsibility for defining the composition of and forming the group pursuant to a representative process approved by the superintendent and the school committee." While the law provides local leeway in the election process, it does affirm the principle of peer selection as follows:

- Parent members are to be **selected by the parents of students attending the school in elections** held by the local recognized parent-teacher organization (PTO). The parent-teacher organization responsible for holding elections for parent representatives to the school council is **that PTO which is most representative** of the entire parent constituency. The electing organization needs to be open to all parents of all children in the school.
- Teacher members are to **be selected by the teachers in the school**.
- **Student council elections or other representative processes** should be used to select the student member.
- **Non-school members may be recruited by the principal** directly or selected by the organizations that are invited to send representatives to the council.

2. Must the council election process be approved?

Yes, although there is no need to do this on a regular basis once the process is approved. The law reads that "the principal, except as otherwise provided herein, shall have the responsibility for defining the composition of and forming the group pursuant to a **representative process approved by the superintendent and school committee**." In addition, when parent elections are held by a locally recognized parent teacher organization, these **elections are held under the direction of the principal**. But the principal may not exert any influence over the nomination and election process.

3. Is it necessary to hold a formal election when the number of candidates for council vacancies equals the number of slots to be filled?

It may cause fewer problems and questions to hold an open election, but it is not necessary. Minimally the council should (1) establish policy on such matters; (2) document that policy in the minutes of the meetings; (3) hold a vote to appoint the members; and (4) notify constituents of the appointments.

School councils are new to me, a parent with third grade triplets. I'm just beginning to understand the level of involvement that I as a parent am able to have. I'm excited to begin a new school year working with our PTO to support the principal and our school council's plan for improvement.

Lori Riley, PTO member Hubbardston Elementary School

4. If a school has more than one parent-teacher organization, which organization holds the election of the parents to the council?

Schools that have more than one equally representative parent-teacher organization should **determine a collaborative process for electing the parent representatives** on the council. Two or more organizations may collaborate to hold an open school-wide election of parents. The primary consideration is that the election of parents be as open and inclusive as possible. Any parent, regardless of membership in a parent teacher organization, is free to run for election to and vote for parent representatives to the council.

5. What happens if there is no parent-teacher organization to hold the election of parents?

Developing a process to elect parents to the council in schools that do not have a formal parent-teacher organization can pose a special challenge. In such a case, the principal is responsible for **developing a representative election process**, subject to approval by the superintendent and school committee.

6. What can principals in small towns do to recruit "other members" for the school councils?

In recruiting other members for the school council, principals may reach out to people in organizations beyond their school district boundaries, including businesses, cultural institutions, colleges and universities, and human service agencies. In addition, nothing in the statute prohibits an individual from serving as an "other" member on more than one school council, as long as the individual has the time and energy to do so.

7. What are some ways of recruiting parents and non-school community members to the councils?

Principals can use several strategies in recruiting such members, among them:

- Posting recruitment notices in school and local papers, bulletin boards, and web-sites.
- Gathering recommendations for community organizations and constituencies from which council members may be recruited. These groups may include higher education, cultural and human service agencies, business, senior citizens, etc..
- Identifying a pool of community partners and representative organizations with an interest in supporting school improvement. Schools can select from this pool and invite organizations to send representatives to the council.
- Inviting parents and the community to an evening informational meeting at which the school council is explained and volunteer nominations are sought.
- Recruiting in conjunction with a forum, possibly with a respected guest speaker, on an issue of current concern to the community. Recruit volunteers at the conclusion of the forum.

As a working parent, the school council has been a great way to be involved with my children's education since I'm not available during the day... In my town, the school councils came together to discuss district-wide changes that are impacting the entire school community. Without the councils, this kind of "whole community" engagement wouldn't have happened.

Christine Harris
Scituate School Council Member

One benefit of parent participation is that we are not as limited as teachers and administrators in what we can ask and say. Often parents raise questions and concerns that otherwise would not be heard. We are better able to do such things as bring an issue to light or advocate for funding if it is lacking.

Charles Curry, Co-Chair
Bennett School Council, Taunton

8. What can be done when council members, elected by their peers, decline to participate or formally resign?

If members of the council simply do not show up for meetings, then meetings can go on without them, assuming there are enough attendees to constitute a quorum. When a member formally resigns from the council, the principal should notify the group from which the individual was selected that there is an opening on the council and take steps to fill that vacancy. If no one from the appropriate group is willing to participate after notice has been given of the opportunity, then the council can continue to function without representatives from this group.

9. How can vacancies be filled?

The law leaves this matter up to the principal to decide "pursuant to a representative process approved by the superintendent and school committee." Several options can be considered, among them:

(1) offering the seat to the ***person with the second highest number of votes*** *(from the representative group) in the most recent election; (2) If s/he is unavailable, it can be offered to any of the other non-elected candidates; (3) If there are no remaining candidates, the principal may hold a special election to fill the vacancy; or (4) ask the parent or faculty organization to recruit someone to fill the position temporarily until the next election.*

C. Council Eligibility

> In order for teachers to help plan for school improvement, educational information from the State and the District should reach teachers as well as superintendents and principals. They are the ones in the classroom with first-hand knowledge. They are the ones that address students' needs and parents' concerns.
>
> *Fall River Council Member, 1999 DOE School Council workshop evaluation comment*

1. May a parent who is separated from a spouse and living in another community serve on the school council in the school that the child attends?

Yes. The law does not specify a residency requirement for school council membership. As long as the parent has a child attending the school, the parent may serve on the school council.

2. May administrators other than principals serve on the council?

Generally no. One obtains a seat on the council through election by one's peers (parents or teachers) or by appointment by the principal (as in the case of community members). The principal has ready access to the school's administrative team, so it is inappropriate for the principal to appoint administrators to the seats on the school council that are reserved for "other persons, not parents or teachers of students at the school." In some circumstances, however, a faculty member who performs some administrative duties may serve on the school council. Specifically, the teachers in the school may, if they choose to do so, select as a teacher representative on the council a faculty member such as a department head or assistant principal who is in the teachers' bargaining unit. The faculty member's administrative duties would not disqualify him or her from being selected by the teachers as one of their representatives on the council.

3. May an individual who is a teacher at another school in the district serve as an "other person" community member of the council?

The law is silent on this matter. It defines the "other person" as someone who is "not a parent or teacher of students at the school." It further describes the "other persons" on the council as "drawn from such groups or entities as municipal government, business or labor organizations, institutions of higher education, or other interested parties." Therefore, a teacher or administrator from another school in the district who is a member of any of the groups identified above can serve as an "other person" on any school council. **In filling these positions, it is important to maintain a balance in representation between educator and lay members of the council in order to adhere to the "parity" standard referred to in the law.**

4. May an individual who is both a parent and a teacher at the school serve on the council?

If a parent of a child attending the school also serves as a teacher at that school, that person may serve only as a teacher member of the council. An individual who is supervised and evaluated by the principal may not be elected as a parent member of a council that is co-chaired by that same principal.

> [At workshops] It would be nice if parents could meet separately sometimes. It's kind of intimidating to comment when you are surrounded by teachers and administrators.
>
> *Holyoke School Council Member, 1999 DOE workshop*

5. May substitute teachers serve on the council?

The law is silent on this issue. The language regarding membership categories uses three terms to refer to educators at the school: "teachers," "staff at the school," and "school-based professionals." Because substitutes have varying relationships with the school, such as occasional temporary, temporary full-time, and permanent full-time, the issue regarding substitutes revolves around the nature of the service. A full-time substitute teacher may be elected as a teacher member of the council. A parent of a student at the school who occasionally works as a substitute teacher at that school may be elected as a parent member of a council if the substitute service really is occasional (e.g., if the total number of days that the parent serves as a substitute at that particular school does not exceed 90 days). Because the most important judges of representation are those who are being represented, it makes sense to check with the other parents or teachers to determine if they are comfortable choosing a substitute teacher as one of their representatives.

6. May non-classroom based school professionals serve in the "teacher" membership category on the council?

Yes, if they are elected by the teachers at the school. Such professionals (e.g., guidance counselors, program coordinators) provide important services to students and bring another perspective to the council's discussions and planning process.

7. May other school staff serve on the council and, if so, in what membership category?

"Other school staff" includes custodians, lunchroom staff, and others who are not education professionals. Like non-classroom based education professionals, these people can provide an important perspective on the needs of the school and its students. Other school staff, who are not parents, teachers, or students at the school, may be appointed to serve as "other person" members. It is important; however, to maintain a balance so that the council's **"other person" membership category is not filled exclusively or even predominantly by school employees.**

School council meetings are opportunities for reflection as well as council business. It is a time to explore the various roles educators, parents, and the community can play in supporting improvement goals.

John Desses, Educational Specialist, MA Department of Education

8. May an individual serve as an "other person" on more than one school council?

Yes. Nothing in the legislative language prohibits this practice. Schools and school systems that exercise this option will want to consider the value-added benefit of having key community resource people serving on multiple councils and whether such persons' time and energy be stretched too thin. Service on multiple councils may make sense, however, in instances in which a business, human service agency, or higher education institution is part of a partnership consortium with several schools.

9. May school committee members serve on a council in the school district that is overseen by the school committee?

I have seen some heated debates at council meetings, but these disagreements often bring important points out in the open where they can be addressed.

Marcella Russell, Lynn Middle School Council Parent

A school committee member who is a parent of a student attending a school may run and be elected to serve as a parent member of a council. **It is contrary to the spirit of the law, however, for a school committee member to be appointed to serve as an "other person" or public member of the council**. The intent is to widen the base of citizen involvement and support for the school. School committee members are already involved at the highest level of local school governance and are not encouraged to serve on school councils.

10. May school committee members serve in an *ex-officio* capacity on a school council?

Pursuant to the school council statute, G.L. c. 71, s.59C, there is only one *ex officio* member of a school council, the principal. The term *ex-officio* means "by virtue of the office". The principal is a school council member simply because s/he is the principal. No other offices or positions carry that designation for school councils.

11. May two parents or teachers share one slot on a council?

Yes, if the half-time members were elected by their peers and if they alternate attendance at meetings.

D. Running Meetings

1. What are the characteristics of effective council meetings?

While council meetings differ as much as the councils and the schools they represent, experience shows that the most effective councils do the following:

- Determine the dates and time of meetings at the beginning of each year to assure the attendance and participation of council members. *Some councils meet on a regular monthly schedule. Others hold regular meetings at the beginning of the school year and then convene on an "as-needed" basis to conserve time and energy and avoid meeting "for the sake of meeting."*

- Develop agendas that are focused and to the point. Distribute materials in advance of the meetings. *Concise agendas keep meetings focused and provide continuity from meeting to meeting. Members receive the agenda, minutes, and materials in advance to ensure that members are prepared and time is not spent reviewing materials.*

- Invite the public to attend meetings. Input is encouraged through a public comment period.
  Posted council schedules and agendas can serve as invitations for other interested members of the school and community to provide input to the council.

- Keep minutes. Post and distribute copies (e. g., at meetings, on school web-site).
  This practice provides continuity from meeting to meeting and informs others about council activity. Note: this is also a requirement under the open meeting law

- Conflict is viewed as a natural part of shared decision-making. Each member's views are respected even when opposing. *This attitude encourages an honest exchange of ideas and opinions. Note: Councils are encouraged to establish ground rules and a code of conduct for meetings.*

- Form subcommittees to address specific goals and/or tasks.
  Subcommittee work is effective in preventing "burn-out" by allowing council members to focus on their areas of interest and expertise.

When a council conducts a survey or when its members formally consult their constituents, these outreach efforts should result in feedback from the council on how this information was used. In the same spirit, school committees and other school officials who are the recipients of the council's recommendations should agree on a timeline and a format for a response.

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2. Must the principal provide a secretary to take minutes at school council meetings?

No. While minutes must be kept according to the open meeting law, this is clearly the principal's decision. Many principals ensure that minutes are kept by asking for a volunteer, or asking that all members share the responsibility by rotation.

3. Should councils make decisions by consensus or by majority rule?

Both methods are used by councils. Since a major product of the council is the school improvement plan, it makes sense to adopt such a plan through consensus even though it can be painstaking and time consuming. Some councils find it useful to adopt a dual-level of decision making. Consensus is recommended for major issues such as the development of the school plan, while a majority vote can be used on procedural questions and issues.

4. What is consensus decision-making?

Consensus decision-making is a way of working together that does not require unanimity of agreement. Members of a consensus decision making process may disagree with a final decision but agree to go along with it. **At the heart of the consensus process is the importance of each group member's viewpoint and the**

opportunity to express his/her views. Under a consensus process, it is perfectly acceptable for a member to say, "I disagree with this decision but I am willing to support it."

5. What are some basic rules that can facilitate shared decision-making?

The law contains language such as "assist" or "consult with" the principal. Clearly it envisions that councils will share in decisions that are the formal prerogative of principals, to whom the law has given increased responsibilities for the operational management of the school. Experience suggests that there are a few basic rules that can turn council meetings into a collaborative and positive experience:

- Explicitly state the issue that must be decided and why. *Where does the problem originate? What values are at stake if the problem is not addressed?*
- At the outset, communicate clearly who will make the final decision (e.g., council, principal, school committee) and identify any constraints that will affect the scope or content of the decision. *The authority to decide and the ability to implement are two different matters. Accordingly, all of the constraints on schools such as budget, staffing, time, and regulations should be laid out on the table as the group begins its decision-making process.*
- Keep in touch. *Communicate formally with all of those involved in the decisions that are being made. If important information or decisions change, ensure that all council members and the larger school community are informed.*

> Although parents and teachers may not say things the same way, I find we often are saying the same thing. Parents get to the point, looking at student issues from a personal perspective, while ours is more global. Recently, we looked at the school mission, vision, and culture. The different perspectives were valuable. Our principal is open to listening to these perspectives and shares outcomes with the larger school community to secure further input and endorsement.
>
> *Janice Sloan Riolo, Teacher, Balch School, Norwood*

6. Is the council's work stopped if under work-to-rule conditions the teachers on the council stop participating?

No. As long as access is guaranteed, an individual member's or a group's decision not to participate cannot stop the work of the whole council and thus deny other constituencies the opportunity to participate. Under the Open Meeting Law, a quorum for the council is a simple majority of current members, so meetings may be conducted in the absence of one constituency if enough other members attend.

> It troubles me to hear some folks paint all administrators with a broad brush as obstacles to change and collaboration. Many of us value the help of our councils. ...We could use more training and better public relations on school councils.
>
> *RD Brown, retired Principal, Melrose*

Part Three: Roles and Responsibility

A. Oversight

> In order for councils to be effective, principals need to: (1) ensure that council members are trained on rules governing councils; (2) convey information to councils in an accurate and timely manner; and (3) interpret assessment results as part of improvement planning.
>
> *George Luongo*
> *North Reading High School Council*

1. Who is responsible for organizing a school council?

The law explicitly gives the school **principal responsibility for defining the composition and overseeing the formation of the council** consistent with a representative process approved by the superintendent and school committee.

As co-chair of the council, the principal is also **responsible for convening the first meeting** of the council no later than 40 days after the first day of school. At this meeting, the other co-chair is to be selected.

2. What form of technical assistance and preparation will benefit councils?

Ongoing training and technical assistance are key in maximizing school council effectiveness. Orientation sessions may be included in initial council meetings or the district might hold a system-wide orientation meeting for all council members. Council training should include:

❖A written copy of meeting expectations, policies, and procedures, including district expectations

❖An explanation of Massachusetts General Laws relevant to school councils

❖ An orientation/update on the district's goals, philosophy, and operations, including an overview of federal and state education laws and collective bargaining agreements

❖ A copy of the district's improvement plan outlining standards and policies that need to be reflected in the school's improvement plan

❖ School committee criteria/procedures for the review and approval of school improvement plans

❖ The district's budget making process and calendar

❖ Capacity building training on topics such as: decision-making, agenda setting, and conflict resolution

3. What authority do school committees have over school councils?

The law provides an explicit oversight role for school committees. The relationship between school committees and school councils has a strong potential for strengthening lay governance in public education. Regarding school councils, school committees have the responsibility to:

❖ Set district-wide performance standards and educational policies for school improvement

❖ Review and approve school improvement plans for each school in the district

❖ In consultation with the superintendent of schools, approve a representative process for the election of parent and teacher members of the council

❖ Determine whether school councils in the district shall have additional authority in the area of educational policy, beyond the functions mandated by G.L. c.71, s, 59C.

4. Are school committees required to provide a written set of expectations for school councils?

While it is not a requirement, written expectations would help to clarify the roles and processes of site based management. School committees need to work with the superintendent and council members to develop local guidelines that achieve the law's intent. Of course, such guidelines cannot impede councils' obligation to fulfill their mandated functions. School committees are encouraged to develop local guidelines that:

- ❖ Define the process for development and approval of school improvement plans
- ❖ Set goals for diverse representation on the council
- ❖ Outline any additional authority in the area of educational policy
- ❖ Reflect school committees' experience in participatory and inclusive decision-making

5. What role does the superintendent play with respect to school councils?

The superintendent works with the school committee to review and approve the representative process for forming school councils. As chief executive for the school district, the superintendent also works with principals and the school committee to align the district improvement plan and school improvement plans.

A district improvement plan is not a fixed document reflecting the ideas of its administrators alone but a working document developed by a planning committee with representation from all the stakeholders: school administration, staff, parents, and community.

John Desses, Education Specialist, MA Department of Education

6. Is it appropriate for the district to shape a school's improvement plan?

Yes, by means of the district improvement plan. Consistency between the district improvement plan and the school improvement plans is critical. The district improvement plan is the umbrella that provides the vision, mission, and goals for the district. Like a school improvement plan, the district's plan is an accountability tool, a strategic plan that addresses student achievement through data analysis and goal setting. It is reasonable for district administration to ask principals to develop school improvement plans closely aligned with the district's plan, based on a school's needs assessment and analysis of school data.

7. What is the school committee's responsibility for ensuring alignment of school and district plans?

School committees are instrumental in the development of the district improvement plan. It is their responsibility to "establish educational goals and policies for the schools in the district consistent with the requirements of law and statewide goals and standards established by the Board of Education." [G.L. Chapter 71, Section 37] School committees have a critical role to play in certifying development of the district improvement plan and providing resources and support to school councils to ensure both alignment and distinctiveness in each school's plan.

I just finished a year on the the Mendon-Upton Middle High School Council. I was a community member as my children have both graduated. I was feeling out of touch with the workings of my own community and decided to join the group. I really enjoyed the whole experience because the council had a wide range of members from various perspectives and age ranges.[...] Council members were valued. I appreciated that all views and ideas were considered and several were incorporated in many areas.

Mary Jo Jones, Director of Pupil Personnel in Hopedale

8. May the school committee adopt local conflict of interest provisions that are more stringent than those contained in state law?

Yes. The conflict of interest law, G.L.c. 268A, specifically provides that municipal agencies are not precluded "from establishing and enforcing additional standards of conduct." Therefore, a school committee may adopt additional standards of conduct. However, such standards must be reasonable and consistent with the purpose and intent of the Education Reform Act.

B. Developing Sound School Improvement Plans (SIP's)

1. What is a "sound" school improvement plan?

Under the School and District Accountability System, evaluators will be asked to determine if a school has a "sound" plan for improvement. A sound plan would be one that is strategically aligned with the district improvement plan and addresses:

- ❖ student achievement in setting priorities and objectives
- ❖ the use of data in needs analysis, goal setting, and evaluation of outcomes
- ❖ the SIP elements outlined in the G.L. c. 71, s. 59C, paragraph 5.
- ❖ goals and standards, including the student performance standards, adopted by the Board
- ❖ clear priorities, objectives, and strategies
- ❖ evaluative features such as outcomes, timelines, oversight, and resources
- ❖ goals that will lend themselves to implementing school programs and shaping educators' individual professional development plans

> I am encouraged to see educators and councils looking at data in planning for improvement, but we should not ignore valuable data because it's not easily quantifiable. We need to count what counts, not just what's easily countable.
>
> *Debra Brady,*
> *Assistant Superintendent,*
> *Auburn Public Schools*

2. What is the process that leads to the development of a quality school improvement plan?

While the process of improvement planning will vary among councils, minimally, it would involve: (1) broad participation; (2) careful data analysis and hypothesis; and clarity of purpose. In their representative roles, council members are encouraged to gather input and feedback from the larger school community for consideration and analysis in planning. Finally, a sound plan would also reflect the buy-in of staff and the school community at large.

3. Must a school improvement plan address each element outlined in G.L. c. 71, s. 59C, each year?

A sound school improvement plan is not determined by the number of goals and activities but by clear links to student achievement and thoughtful needs analysis in goal setting. It would be unrealistic to expect a school to focus its efforts on each of the elements in the law each year, particularly if the district's priorities dictate otherwise, but a plan's narrative could reference components that were addressed in previous years or that will be in future plans.

4. Must the school improvement plan be aligned with other school and district plans?

Yes. Schools, teachers, and districts are required to align their plans strategically as a means of coordinating planning for improvement and ultimately increased student achievement. For example, the school council statute says that the school improvement plan shall be consistent with the educational policies of the district as well as with state goals and standards. The Regulations on Recertification require each educator to have a professional development plan that is aligned with the school and district improvement plan. When all of these plans are goals are well conceived and in harmony with each other, the school community as a whole can be more effective in improving student achievement.

5. May a school improvement plan be a multi-year rather than an annual plan?

While there is nothing to prevent a school from writing a multi-year master plan in addition to its annual SIP, the law is clear: "Each school improvement plan shall be submitted to the school committee for review and approval every year." While it is important to map out long-term goals and plans, the principal and school council need to review and update the school improvement plan each year, to keep it current, strengthen it where needed, and meet the requirements of the law.

6. When should the annual school improvement plans be submitted, and to whom?

The principal and the school council shall submit the school improvement plan to the school committee for review and approval every year. The school committee should set a schedule for submission and review of the improvement plans, and should communicate the schedule to all principals and school councils. Typically, the school committee will ask school councils to submit their improvement plans early enough in the spring so that the committee can consider the plans when it develops the school budget for the following year.

7. When must a school improvement plan be approved by the school committee?

Other than requiring that the plan be submitted annually to the school committee, the law is silent on this issue. Common sense would suggest that in order to meet the goals and implement the activities of an annual plan, it should be **ready for implementation as early in the school year as possible.**

8. May a school committee reject all or parts of a school improvement plan?

Yes. The **law gives school committees final authority to approve the individual school plans**. " Each school improvement plan shall be submitted to the school committee for review and approval every year. If said school improvement plan is not reviewed by the school committee **within thirty days of said school committee receiving said school improvement plan**, the plan shall be deemed to have been approved."

The process of **review can be an ongoing conversation between the school committee and the school councils** in its school district. Unapproved elements of the plan can be sent back to the schools for further development and can be resubmitted in a revised form. A clear and published set of school committee expectations regarding school improvement plans can reduce the possibility of disapproved plans.

9. What happens if there is no regularly scheduled school committee meeting within 30 days of the submission of a school improvement plan?

If a school committee fails to take action within 30 calendar days, the plan is automatically approved. In order to avoid having to approve an unreviewed plan or schedule a special meeting, school committees should specify in advance the date on which plans must be submitted.

Under the Education Reform Law, "Principals shall be the educational administrators and managers of their schools and shall supervise the operation and management of their school and school property subject to the supervision and direction of the superintendent." School councils have a very important role to play in assisting the principal in this new and difficult role. Councils must also understand that their improvement plans must be consistent with the mission, goals, policies, and budget of the district determined by the school committee and superintendent.

William Densmore, Founding Director, Mass Business Alliance for Education

10. Does the superintendent have to approve the school improvement plan?

The law is silent on the superintendent's role with regard to school improvement plans. The superintendent should be involved in reviewing school plans for alignment with district and professional development plans. A superintendent may request a copy of the school improvement plan before it is brought before the school committee. In addition, the school committee may ask the superintendent to review the district's school improvement plans on its behalf.

11. Does the Department of Education review school improvement plans?

In 1999, the Board of Education established the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System focused on student results expressed as both performance and improvement. The Accountability System will track the progress of every school in every district in improving the performance of its students towards State standards. As part of a district or school evaluation, the Department may request a copy of the school improvement plan in order to evaluate how a school is planning for such improvement.

12. Is there anyone else who reviews a school improvement plan?

The school improvement plan is a public record. School staff and parents should review their school's improvement plan each year. The Recertification Regulations **require that every educator align his/her professional development plan with his/her school's improvement plan.**

C. Implementation and Evaluation

> The philosophy behind school councils is sound; it's the implementation that's often faulty. We assume that we innately know how to plan and execute school improvement goals and we get frustrated when we come up short. Good implementation depends on structures and people. I understand why principals, school boards, and superintendents are suspicious. Shared decision making is not easy! But, before we throw up our hands and say, "This doesn't work," we need to learn how to make it work. Training is critical.
>
> *Marilyn Fratturelli, Assistant Superintendent,* Leominster Public Schools

1. What is the council's role in implementing the school improvement plan?

In developing a sound school improvement plan the council should identify individuals responsible for seeing that programs and activities are implemented. The council should also see that a timeline has been established and resources identified for each goal in the plan. At a pre-determined time in the school year, the council should meet to evaluate and document the school's success in carrying out its annual plan.

2. What are the benefits of a school council coordinating with other groups or committees within the school and district?

When groups within a school or a district collaborate it is more likely that goals will be achieved. Such coordination helps to ensure that various groups do not exist in isolation, duplicate efforts, or develop conflicting programs. There are several ways to coordinate school council efforts with existing structures and the larger school community:

- Establish communication among school councils through district-wide meetings and council liaisons
- Open up the dialogue by inviting leadership teams and committees in the school and/or district to attend meetings and/or speak on relevant agenda items
- Promote and support the representative nature of council membership
- Organize the school council as a subcommittee of a larger umbrella group
- Discuss how groups within the school and/or district might interact with one another

3. How might a council evaluate its effectiveness?

This is a critical aspect of effective site based management and one that councils are encouraged to address. There are numerous benchmarks for success, among them:

- **The use of data:** Did the council use local/state data to assess progress on an annual basis?
- **Collaboration:** Did all council members contribute to the development and review of the school improvement plan before it was sent to the school committee?

> A school council offers a unique opportunity for family members and the community to come together in support of quality education. By its legal definition, it binds all parties to commit to identifying both needs and pathways to improvement.
>
> *Kathleen Callahan, Community Liaison,* Taunton Public Schools

- **Participation**: Did the council involve the larger community in its work? Were other members of the school community asked to make presentations or meet with the council? Was the school improvement plan shared with the larger school community? Were council agendas and minutes distributed to other school organizations/committees?
- **Representation**: Is the council reasonably representative of the geographic, socio-economic, and ethnic make-up of the school community?
- **Resource enhancement**: Did the council involve its representative members to establish links with groups that could contribute to the goals in the school improvement plan? (e.g., skills, in-kind contributions of time, knowledge, and material resources)
- **Internal functioning**: Did the council reach closure on important issues?

Did council meetings have good attendance?

D. Finance

1. Where can a school secure funds for training and support of its school council?

Language in the state budget has annually required that each district spend a certain amount ($125 per pupil in FY00 and FY01) out of general fund sources (which does not include grants) for professional development. Training for school council members would be an allowable expenditure for this purpose. In addition, as outlined in Chapter 71, S. 38Q of Massachusetts General Laws, a school's professional development plan "shall also include training for members of school councils":

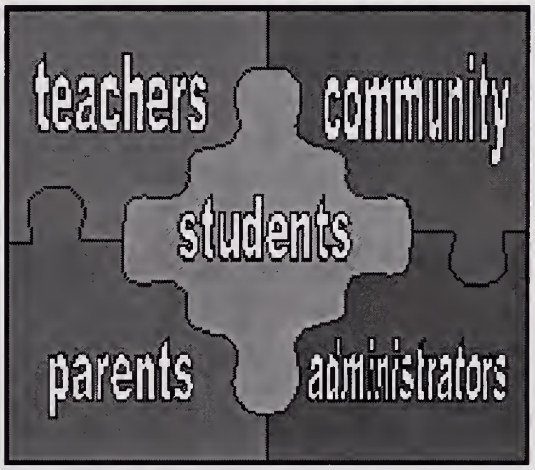
Every school district in the commonwealth shall adopt and implement a professional development plan for all principals, teachers and other professional staff employed by the district [...] **within the confines of the foundation budget.** Said plan shall include training in the teaching of new curriculum frameworks and other skills required for the effective implementation of this act, including participatory decision making, and parent and community involvement. Said plan shall also include training for members of school councils, pursuant to section fifty-nine C.

Effective and continuous school improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation are essential for the improvement of our schools.

Bobbie D'Alessandro, Superintendent, Cambridge

2. May a council solicit or accept funds from the school's PTO or PTA to support programs and activities in the school improvement plan?

Yes. Such funds would be viewed and treated the same as any other donations the school may receive. Of course, solicitation and acceptance of these funds would be done at the discretion of the school principal and would require his/her approval.



NOTES

Appendix A:

Other Massachusetts Statutes Related to School Councils

NOTES

Appendix A: Other Massachusetts Statutes Related to School Councils
(Note: Throughout the statutes cited, bold print has been added for increased focus.)*

Chapter 71: Section 38Q. Professional development plans; statewide assistance plan.

Section 38Q. Every school district in the commonwealth shall adopt and implement a professional development plan for all principals, teachers, other professional staff, paraprofessionals and teacher assistants employed by the district, to include the professional support teams established pursuant to section thirty-eight G, and annually shall update such plans and set forth a budget for professional development within the confines of the foundation budget. Said plan shall include training in the teaching of new curriculum frameworks and other skills required for the effective implementation of this act, including participatory decision making, and parent and community involvement. The plan shall also include training in: (1) analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all students in order to achieve an objective of inclusion in the regular classroom of students with diverse learning styles; and (2) methods of collaboration among teachers, paraprofessionals and teacher assistants tom accommodate such styles. The plan may also include training in the provision of pre-referral services within regular education. Said plan shall include training in the teaching of new curriculum frameworks and other skills required for the effective implementation of this act, including participatory decision making, and parent and community involvement. **Said plan shall also include training for members of school councils, pursuant to section fifty-nine C.** Said plan may include teacher training which addresses the effects of gender bias in the classroom.

Councils need training. We need to know we are not working in a vacuum. For example, our council is trying to address poor parent involvement because we think it affects [school] climate and achievement. We'd like to learn how other schools address this problem.

Danvers School Council Member, 1999 DOE School Council Training, evaluation comment

71:38Q1/2. Curriculum accommodation plan.

Section 38Q1/2. A school district shall adopt and implement a curriculum accommodation plan to assist principals in ensuring that all efforts have been made to meet students' needs in regular education. The plan shall be designed to assist the regular classroom teacher in analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all children in the regular classroom and in providing appropriate services and support within the regular education program including, but not limited to, direct and systematic instruction in reading and provision of services to address the needs of children whose behavior may interfere with learning, or who do not qualify for special education services under chapter 71B. The curriculum accommodation plan shall include provisions encouraging teacher mentoring and collaboration and parental involvement.

Chapter 71: Section 37H. Policies relative to conduct of teachers or students; student handbooks.

Section 37H. The superintendent of every school district shall publish the district's policies pertaining to the conduct of teachers and students. Said policies shall prohibit the use of any tobacco products within the school buildings, the school facilities or on the school grounds or on school buses by any individual, including school personnel. Copies of these policies shall be provided to any person upon request and without cost by the principal of every school within the district.

Each school district's policies pertaining to the conduct of students shall include the following: disciplinary proceedings, including procedures assuring due process; standards and procedures for suspension and expulsion of students; procedures pertaining to discipline of students with special needs; standards and procedures to assure school building security and safety of students and school personnel; and the disciplinary measures to be taken in cases involving the possession or use of illegal substances or weapons, the use of force, vandalism, or violation of other student's civil rights. Codes of discipline, as well as procedures used to develop such codes shall be filed with the department of education for informational purposes only.

In Amesbury, our handbook is created by students and teachers. It is imperative to have student input in a handbook that is created for them. The students at Amesbury High have made small and large changes in their handbook, from changing the wording of a sentence to the entire dress-code in order to satisfy teachers as well as students.

Erik Trofatter, Student
Amesbury High School,
Class of 2000

In each school building containing the grades nine to twelve, inclusive, the principal, in consultation with the school council, shall prepare and distribute to each student a student handbook setting forth the rules pertaining to the conduct of students. The school council shall review the student handbook each spring to consider changes in disciplinary policy to take effect in September of the following school year, but may consider policy changes at any time. The annual review shall cover all areas of student conduct, including but not limited to those outlined in this section.

Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, all student handbooks shall contain the following provisions:

(a) Any student who is found on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, in possession of a dangerous weapon, including, but not limited to, a gun or a knife; or a controlled substance as defined in chapter ninety-four C, including, but not limited to, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, may be subject to expulsion from the school or school district by the principal.

(b) Any student who assaults a principal, assistant principal, teacher, teacher's aide or other educational staff on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, may be subject to expulsion from the school or school district by the principal.

Students grow from the experience and responsibility of school council membership[...] They are a valuable resource for schools in decision-making and planning for the achievement of all students.

Rachelle M. Engler,
Director,
Office of Student Leadership
MA Department of Education

(c) Any student who is charged with a violation of either paragraph (a) or (b) shall be notified in writing of an opportunity for a hearing; provided, however, that the student may have representation, along with the opportunity to present evidence and witnesses at said hearing before the principal.

After said hearing, a principal may, in his discretion, decide to suspend rather than expel a student who has been determined by the principal to have violated either paragraph (a) or (b).

(d) Any student who has been expelled from a school district pursuant to these provisions shall have the right to appeal to the superintendent. The expelled student shall have ten days from the date of the expulsion in which to notify the superintendent of his appeal. The student has the right to counsel at a hearing before the superintendent. The subject matter of the appeal shall not be limited solely to a factual determination of whether the student has violated any provisions of this section.

(e) When a student is expelled under the provisions of this section, no school or school district within the commonwealth shall be required to admit such student or to provide educational services to said student. If said student does apply for admission to another school or school district, the superintendent of the school district to which the application is made may request and shall receive from the superintendent of the school expelling said student a written statement of the reasons for said expulsion.

I have had the pleasure of working with Boston school principals who were good about listening to parents. They went beyond the open meeting law encouraging all parents to attend council meetings and address the council.

Glenola Mitchell, Community Development Specialist,
MA Department of Education

Chapter 39: Section 23B. Open meetings of governmental bodies.

Section 23B. All meetings of a governmental body shall be open to the public and any person shall be permitted to attend any meeting except as otherwise provided by this section.

No quorum of a governmental body shall meet in private for the purpose of deciding on or deliberating toward a decision on any matter except as provided by this section.

No executive session shall be held until the governmental body has first convened in an open session for which notice has been given, a majority of the members have voted to go into executive session and the vote of each member is recorded on a roll call vote and entered into the minutes, the presiding officer has cited the purpose for an executive session, and the presiding officer has stated before the executive session if the governmental body will reconvene after the executive session.

Nothing except the limitation contained in this section shall be construed to prevent the governmental body from holding an executive session after an open meeting has been convened and a recorded vote has been taken to hold an executive session. Executive sessions may be held only for the following purposes:

(1)To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health rather than the professional competence of an individual, provided that the individual involved in such executive session has been notified in writing by the governmental body, at least forty-eight hours prior to the proposed executive session. Notification may be waived upon agreement of the parties. A governmental body shall hold an open meeting if the individual involved requests that the meeting be open. If an executive session is held, such individual shall have the following rights:

When parents and the community are made aware of and have say in the policies of their school, they are likely to support and assist in carrying out those policies.

Canton School Council Member (1999 DOE workshop) evaluation comment)

(a) to be present at such executive session during discussions or considerations which involve that individual.

(b) to have counsel or a representative of his own choosing present and attending for the purpose of advising said individual and not for the purpose of active participation in said executive session.

(c) to speak in his own behalf.

(2) To consider the discipline or dismissal of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member, or individual, provided that the individual involved in such executive session pursuant to this clause has been notified in writing by the governmental body at least forty-eight hours prior to the proposed executive session. Notification may be waived upon agreement of the parties. A governmental body shall hold an open meeting if the individual involved requests that the meeting be open. If an executive session is held, such individual shall have the following rights:

(a) to be present at such executive session during discussions or considerations which involve that individual.

(b) to have counsel or a representative of his own choosing present and attending for the purpose of advising said individual and not for the purpose of active participation.

(c) to speak in his own behalf.

(3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the governmental body, to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.

(4) To discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices.

(5) To investigate charges of criminal misconduct or to discuss the filing of criminal complaints.

(6)To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property, if such discussions may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the governmental body and a person, firm or corporation.

(7) To comply with the provisions of any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements.

(8) To consider and interview applicants for employment by a preliminary screening committee or a subcommittee appointed by a governmental body if an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants; provided, however, that this clause shall not apply to any meeting, including meetings of a preliminary screening committee or a subcommittee appointed by a governmental body, to consider and interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening.

(9) To meet or confer with a mediator, as defined in section twenty-three C of chapter two hundred and thirty-three, with respect to any litigation or decision on any public business within its jurisdiction involving another party, group or body, provided that: (a) any decision to participate in mediation shall be made in open meeting session and the parties, issues involved and purpose of the mediation shall be disclosed; and (b) no action shall be taken by any governmental body with respect to those issues which are the subject of the mediation without deliberation and approval for such action at an open meeting after such notice as may be required in this section.

This section shall not apply to any chance meeting, or a social meeting at which matters relating to official business are discussed so long as no final agreement is reached. No chance meeting or social meeting shall be used in circumvention of the spirit or requirements of this section to discuss or act upon a matter over which the governmental body has supervision, control, jurisdiction or advisory power.

Except in an emergency, a notice of every meeting of any governmental body shall be filed with the clerk of the city or town in which the body acts, and the notice or a copy thereof shall, at least forty-eight hours, including Saturdays but not Sundays and legal holidays, prior to such meeting, be publicly posted in the office of such clerk or on the principal official bulletin board of such city or town. The secretary of a regional school district committee shall be considered to be its clerk and he shall file the notice of meetings of the committee with the clerk of each city or town within such district and each such clerk shall post the notice in his office or on the principal official bulletin board of the city or town and such secretary shall post such notice in his office or on the principal official bulletin board of the district. If the meeting shall be of a regional or district governmental body, the officer calling the meeting shall file the notice thereof with the clerk of each city and town within such region or district, and each such clerk shall post the notice in his office or on the principal official bulletin board of the city or town. The notice shall be printed in easily readable type and shall contain the date, time and place of such meeting. Such filing and posting shall be the responsibility of the officer calling such meeting.

A governmental body shall maintain accurate records of its meetings, setting forth the date, time, place, members present or absent and action taken at each meeting, including executive sessions. The records of each meeting shall become a public record and be available to the public; provided, however, that the records of any executive session may remain secret as long as publication may defeat the lawful purposes of the executive session, but no longer. All votes taken in executive sessions shall be recorded roll call votes and shall become a part of the record of said executive sessions. No votes taken in open session shall be by secret ballot.

A meeting of a governmental body may be recorded by any person in attendance by means of a tape recorder or any other means of sonic reproduction or by means of videotape equipment fixed in one or more designated locations determined by the governmental body except when a meeting is held in executive session; provided, that in such recording there is no active interference with the conduct of the meeting.

Upon qualification for office following an appointment or election to a governmental body, as defined in this section, the member shall be furnished by the city or town clerk with a copy of this section. Each such member shall sign a written acknowledgement that he has been provided with such a copy.

The district attorney of the county in which the violation occurred shall enforce the provisions of this section.

Upon proof of failure by any governmental body or by any member or officer thereof to carry out any of the provisions for public notice or meetings, for holding open meetings, or for maintaining public records thereof, any justice of the supreme judicial court or the superior court sitting within and for the county in which such governmental body acts shall issue an appropriate order requiring such governmental body or member or officer thereof to carry out such provisions at future meetings. Such order may be sought by complaint of three or more registered voters, by the attorney general, or by the district attorney of the county in which the city or town is located. The order of notice on the complaint shall be returnable no later than ten days after the filing thereof and the complaint shall be heard and determined on the return day or on such day thereafter as the court shall fix, having regard to the speediest possible determination of the cause consistent with the rights of the parties; provided, however, that orders with respect to any of the matters referred to in this section may be issued at any time on or after the filing of the complaint without notice when such order is necessary to fulfill the purposes of this section. In the hearing of such complaints the burden shall be on the respondent to show by a preponderance of the evidence that the section complained of in such complaint was in accordance with and authorized by section eleven A½ of chapter thirty A, by section nine G of chapter thirty-four or by this section. All processes may be issued from the clerk's office in the county in which the action is brought and, except as aforesaid, shall be returnable as the court orders.

Such order may invalidate any action taken at any meeting at which any provision of this section has been violated, provided that such complaint is filed within twenty-one days of the date when such action is made public.

Any such order may also, when appropriate, require the records of any such meeting to be made public, unless it shall have been determined by such justice that the maintenance of secrecy with respect to such records is authorized. The remedy created hereby is not exclusive, but shall be in addition to every other available remedy. Such order may also include reinstatement without loss of compensation, seniority, tenure or other benefits for any employee discharged at a meeting or hearing held in violation of the provisions of this section.

Such order may also include a civil fine against the governmental body in an amount no greater than one thousand dollars for each meeting held in violation of this section.

The rights of an individual set forth in this section relative to his appearance before a meeting in an executive or open session, are in addition to the rights that an individual may have from any other source, including, but not limited to, rights under any laws or collective bargaining agreements, and the exercise or non-exercise of the individual rights under this section shall not be construed as a waiver of any rights of the individual.

In my children's school, the council works in collaboration with the PTA to keep parents and the community informed. Together, they created a bulletin board outside the school so parents could know what was happening in the school. School council minutes and meeting dates were among the postings. In addition, the council and PTA crafted home newsletters and web-site updates to keep us all informed.

Joel Nitzberg, Parent Involvement Project Director,
MA Department of Education

Appendix B:

Glossary

NOTES

Glossary

at-large: a term used to describe an elected official not representing a specific region/area but the area as a whole.

bargaining unit: a group of workers organized to negotiate collectively with the employer on wages, hours, and working conditions.

by-law: a rule adopted by an organization (e.g., school council) for managing its internal affairs.

collaboration: the act of working together towards a common goal or set of goals.

collective bargaining: negotiation between the representatives of organized workers and their employer to determine wages, hours, and working conditions.

consensus: a view or decision reached by a group as a whole or by majority will.

constituent: a person who authorizes another to act in his or her behalf.

Education Reform Act: the 1993 Massachusetts law that establishes public school reform through statewide educational standards and accountability, equitable funding, and innovations such as school councils.

ex-officio: by virtue of office or position.

majority rule: a policy by which decisions binding on a group are made by more than half the votes.

needs assessment: an analysis or evaluation of the needs of students and staff.

open meeting law: the Massachusetts law that requires governmental bodies to conduct their deliberations and decisions-making in public, except in specific limited circumstances.

parity: equality in status and/or number.

professional development: the organized and planned development of a staff member's skills and abilities.

PTA (Parent Teacher Association): an established voluntary child advocacy organization that operates at the local, state, and national level.

PTO (Parent Teacher Organization): a school based voluntary group of parents and teachers formed to promote mutual understanding and increase the effectiveness of the educational program.

quorum: the minimum number of officers and members of a committee or an organization who must be present for valid transaction of business.

School and District Accountability System: a method of tracking the progress of every school and every district in improving the performance of its students in relation to state standards.

school governance: management of the decisions concerning one or more schools.

school improvement plan: a written plan to address needs, advance goals, and improve the performance of students in a school. G.L. c. 71, s.59C lists the elements of a school improvement plan.

statute: a law enacted by a legislative body.

work-to-rule: type of job action in which employees in a bargaining unit do not accept any duties or responsibilities outside of their contractual work schedule.

NOTES

Appendix C:

Sample School Improvement Plans

www.doe.mass.edu/schcouncil/pubs/sip.ppt.

A STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

This is an excerpt from an actual
Massachusetts school improvement plan.

VISION STATEMENT

All graduates of Public Schools will possess a positive self-image, the ability to think creatively and critically, the desire to learn continually and the skills to become contributing member of their community.

Our students will experience learning that will be purposeful, relevant, timeless, life-long and transferable. There will be high standards, a challenging curriculum, high stakes assessment, access to technology and a commitment to the community.

Our staff will adhere to high standards and expectations and continuous improvement. This will be supported through a strong professional development program and effective supervision and evaluation. Decisions will be based on knowledge of national standards, current research and alignment with a curriculum that matches high stakes state assessment. Parents, community members and business will be engaged in a partnership, which will increase involvement and accountability. We will build positive relationships with the community to broaden the understanding of the educational process, to develop community resources, to enhance learning and to increase student achievement.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Public Schools is to provide a challenging, comprehensive education in a safe environment where all students are respected as individuals.

BELIEFS

We believe:

- School, home and community partnerships are vital for continuous learning and growth.
- Decisions should be made in the bast interest of students.
- Every student is important and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.
- All students can be successful learners is an appropriate setting that meets their learning style
- Learning is ongoing and life-long.
- Individual creativity is fostered by providing students access to athletics, arts and music.

STUDENT GOALS

GOALS IDENTIFIED IN 1999

Annual:

? Demonstrate the ability to meet or exceed state and district academic expectation.

? Develop a respectful attitude towards herself/himself and others.

? Participate in a wide range of enrichment activation activities to develop his/her sense of community.

Short Term (1-3 Tears):

? Each School Council will study the feasibility of developing a plan to involve the students, parents and staff in drafting an individual student educational plan, which will reflect year-to-year academic, social, emotional growth and goals and objectives for each continuing academic year.

? The student will have access to learning options or instructional approaches that relate school learning to practical applications in life and the workplace.

Long Term (3-5 Years):

? The student will meet or exceed State performance standards designed to prepare him/her for post-secondary work or further study.

? The student shall master the basic reading skills at a level commensurate with his/her ability by the end of grade three.

STUDENT GOALS EVALUATION

Annual:

? State and district assessment results will be analyzed annually.

? A. comparison of yearly discipline reports and types of infractions will indicate a change in the behavior of students towards others and themselves.

? Results of participation in the conflict resolution and peer mediation programs will provide evidence through yearly discipline reports.

? Collection of data through student surveys will be used to measure the effectiveness of the conflict resolution programs.

? Summary reports of number and type of school-provided enrichment programs co-curricular, athletic, and community service-based enrichment activities, including numbers of participants, will be used to track numbers of students involved.

? A study will be conducted by individual School Councils to evaluate and review individual student's school improvement plans.

? There will be an annual review of curriculum, program of studies, and specific professional development activities with reinforcement of improvement goals through supervision and evaluation.

TEACHER GOALS

GOALS IDENTIFIED IN 1999

Annual:

? Develop and implement themes of respect and responsibility among staff, parents, students and community.

? Promote initiatives that strengthen and support a positive school culture.

SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN HANDBOOK
1999-2001

This is an excerpt from an actual
Massachusetts school improvement plan.

SAMPLE: OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT

Improvement Area 2:	Mathematics – Secondary Goal
Objective 2.1	Increase students' skill at reading and writing in mathematics
Objective 2.2	Increase the proportion of students in Grade 4 scoring at Proficient and Advanced levels on the MCAS from 10% in 1998 to 30% in 2000. Increase the proportion of students in grade 8 scoring at Proficient and Advanced levels from 60% in 1998 to 80% in 2000.
Objective 2.3	Increase the proportion of students in Grade 8 passing the Algebra Exam from 75% in 1998 to 85% in 2001
Evaluation Measure:	MCAS scores, Algebra Exam scores
Professional Development:	Specific training in strategies for getting information from print, or "reading to learn", additional training in TERC curriculum implementation
Special Programs:	Girls After School Math Mini Course, *Developing Mathematical Ideas*, Algebra Project, Math Night

Improvement Strategies/Activities	Person(s) Responsible for Implementation	Resources	Funding	Time Line	Evaluation Measure	Status
1. Identify the students Failing and Needing Improvement on MCAS, failing Algebra Exam, develop strategies to improve their performance.	Administrators, Teachers, Support Staff	MCAS, Algebra Exam Results, after school	G/F	Annually	MCAS, Algebra Exam scores	
2. Teach and model effective strategies for reading comprehension and writing to explain or persuade	Administrators, Teachers, Support Staff	Research-based Strategies, texts,	G/F/ T	Ongoing	Administrator evaluation	
3. Increase teacher instructional effectiveness with TERC curriculum K-5, CMP curriculum 6-8	Administrators, Teachers, Math Department	Math department workshops, staff Developer, additional TERC training, EDC	G/F	Ongoing	Administrator Evaluation, test scores	

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT

Improvement Area
Objective
Evaluation Measure:
Professional Development:
Special Programs:

Improvement Strategies/Initiatives/Activities	Person(s) Responsible for Implementation	Resources	Funding	Time Line	Evaluation Measure	Status

Appendix D:

School Performance Rating Process Overview

Appendix D:

School Performance Rating Process Overview

http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/spr.html

Accountabilty and Targeted Assistance

School Performance Rating Process Overview

The Department of Education will use the MCAS results to rate Massachusetts public schools. Beginning in the 2000-01 school year, schools will receive both performance and improvement ratings, in each content area and for overall performance. More specifically, the first cycle of the School Performance Rating Process will:

- Serve as a filter to identify schools that may be reviewed more extensively;
- Focus on moving student MCAS performance out of Failing and into Proficient/Advanced;
- Set specific improvement expectations, based on 1998 results, for each content area and for overall performance;
- Use the average of the 1999 and 2000 results to rate performance and improvement from the baseline (1998);
- Measure improvement using the average scaled score; and
- Include English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science & Technology.

Performance Categories & Improvement Expectations

A school's 1998 MCAS results will place that school in a performance category for each content area and for overall performance. The baseline performance categories determine the improvement expectations.

School Performance Categories				Improvement Expectation
Category	Percentage of Students Scoring in			Increase average score by:
	Proficient/Advanced		Failing	
1	80% or more	And	5% or less	1-3 points
2	60% or more	And	10% or less	1-3 points
3	40% or more	And	20% or less	2-4 points
4	20% or more	And	40% or less	3-5 points
5	Less than 20%	Or	41% - 60%	4-6 points
6			More than 60%	5-7 points

Performance & Improvement Ratings

At the end of the cycle, a school will receive performance ratings based on the average of the 1999 and 2000 results and improvement ratings based on the comparison of those results to the baseline results (1998).

Performance Category	Rating
1	Very High
2	High
3	Moderate
4	Low
5	Very Low
6	Critically Low

Improvement Made	Rating
More than Expectation	Exceeded
Within Expectation Range	Met
Within one point below Expectation	Approached
More than one point below Expectation	Failed to Meet

Interpretation of Ratings

A school's overall performance and improvement ratings will place it into one box on a 4x6 matrix. The matrix on the back of this page details the state actions associated with each box for the first cycle.

Performance					

Very High				
High				
Moderate				
Low				
Very Low				
Critically Low				
	Failed to Meet	Approached	Met	Exceeded
	Improvement			

Interpretation of Accountability Ratings - State Action Guide

OVERALL PERFORMANCE	OVERALL IMPROVEMENT			
	Failed to Meet	**Approached**	**Met**	**Exceeded**
Very High		RECOGNITION for very high performance	RECOGNITION for very high performance and for meeting improvement expectations	RECOGNITION for very high performance and for exceeding improvement expectations. Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
High			RECOGNITION for high performance and for meeting improvement expectations	RECOGNITION for high performance and for exceeding improvement expectations. Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Moderate	WARNING that the school and district must strengthen improvement efforts		RECOGNITION for meeting improvement expectations	RECOGNITION for exceeding improvement expectations.Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Low	WARNING that the school and district must strengthen improvement efforts	WARNING that the school and district must strengthen improvement efforts	RECOGNITION for meeting improvement expectations	RECOGNITION for exceeding improvement expectations. Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Very Low	REFERRED FOR REVIEW to determine whether school should be declared under-performing. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	REFERRED FOR REVIEW to determine whether school should be declared under-performing. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	RECOGNITION for meeting improvement expectations.High priority for district support and targeted state assistance.	RECOGNITION for exceeding improvement expectations. Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program.High priority for district support and targeted state assistance
Critically Low	REFERRED FOR REVIEW to determine whether school should be declared under-performing .Top priority for district support and targeted state assistance	REFERRED FOR REVIEW to determine whether school should be declared under-performing .Top priority for district support and targeted state assistance	RECOGNITION for meeting improvement expectations.High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	RECOGNITION for exceeding improvement expectations. Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance

Appendix E:

Evaluating School Performance/ Guiding Questions for Review Panelists

http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/eval01/pan_rev1.html

Accountability and Targeted Assistance

Evaluating School Performance
Stage 2 -- The Panel Review Process

Purpose of the Panel Review Process: Panel reviews are conducted to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data.

Criteria for Referral: The School Performance Rating Process (SPRP), stage one in the three-stage process used to assess school performance under the new Massachusetts School and District Accountability System, is used to identify schools for panel review. Schools that perform in the lowest SPRP categories (very high percentage of students with failing MCAS performance; low percentage proficient and advanced) that on subsequent test administrations do not demonstrate a significant improvement trend are candidates for panel review. Schools with the lowest MCAS overall scaled score have top priority. The number of schools to be referred for panel review in a given year is determined by the Commissioner of Education, taking into account the apparent need for, and resources available to support, the panel review process. Factors other than MCAS results, including a school's attendance and dropout rates, may be considered in the selection of schools to be referred for panel review.

Scope of Review: The Panel's charge is to advise the Commissioner of Education, at the conclusion of the review process, of their judgment on two questions:

1. Does the school under review appear to have a sound plan for improving student performance? and
2. Do the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

Panel members will be provided with guiding questions to help focus their analysis and discussion of the various sources of evidence on which they will rely in formulating responses to these two questions. (See attached document entitled School Panel Review - Guiding Questions.)

Panel members are not expected to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist, and/or recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of sound improvement strategies where such conditions appear not to presently exist. These activities are outside the scope of the panel review process; and are the responsibility of the school and district in the next stage of the process, with guidance, where needed from a fact-finding team.

Outcome of Review Process: If, in the judgment of review panel members, a school under review needs State assistance to formulate a sound improvement plan or to put in place the conditions necessary for successful implementation of a sound improvement plan, the panel will so notify the Commissioner. The Commissioner, if he concurs with the panel's assessment, will declare the school to be under-performing.

Schools that, at the conclusion of the panel review process and the Commissioner's review, are determined to be under-performing will move on to Stage 3 of the school evaluation process, in which an independent fact-finding team is appointed by the Commissioner. The fact-finding team conducts an in-depth diagnostic evaluation of the school, and on the basis of its evaluation advises school and district leaders and the Commissioner and Board of Education as to the course of action team members recommend to promote and support improved academic performance by students at the school.

Schools referred for review that are judged by the panels to be on course for the successful implementation of a sound improvement plan will be given priority for the award of State assistance to support their improvement initiatives.

Panel Membership: Review panels are composed of 3-5 members, a majority who are experienced K-12 educators, school administrators, curriculum coordinators, and/or school program evaluators. Other education professionals, parents and members of the public may be selected for panel service. Individuals selected for participation in review panels will not be assigned to review the performance of any school in a district in which the panelist or any member of his or her immediate family lives or works. Panel members must make a commitment to attend a four-hour orientation session and actively participate in three panel reviews of 1-½ days each. Panels are expected to review and analyze the materials contained in the information packets provided to them at the orientation session in preparation for the panel deliberations that begin on the first evening of the panel review process.

Compensation of Review Panel Members: At the Commissioner's discretion, panel members may be permanent employees of the Department of Education, consultants hired by the Department to perform school and district evaluation functions, school district employees released from their routine duties to participate in this process with the approval of the district superintendent, and privately employed individuals who are released from their routine duties to participate in the panel review process. DOE staff and consultants employed to serve on the review panels will be compensated in accordance with the terms of their respective contracts. Per diem compensation for contractors shall not exceed $500. School district employees and privately employed volunteers who will be paid by their regular employer for the day will receive a $200 honorarium in appreciation of time spent beyond their regular work-day and to cover incidental costs (e.g., travel, childcare) associated with their participation. The Department will provide food and lodging, as necessary, for panel members during the panel review process. Participants may earn professional development points for their review panel service.

Panel Review Protocol:

Notice to Schools Referred For Review

Schools referred for panel review will be notified of their selection at least four weeks prior to the date scheduled for the review of their school. The district superintendent will be notified verbally by the Department and given the opportunity to verbally notify the school's principal and members of the district school committee prior to written notice being sent to the school. The Department will not release to the press and public the names of schools referred for panel review until after all schools referred for review have received their written notice and had at least 24 hours to inform their staff. At least two weeks prior to the review, schools will be notified of the specific date on which the panel will visit their school and meet with school and district leaders to assess the school's improvement plan and prospects for its successful implementation.

Submission of Supplemental Data and Documents By Schools Referred For Review
Schools referred for panel review will be expected to provide the Department with certain data and documents about the school to supplement information routinely collected by DOE. The school will receive written notice from the Department detailing the data and documents it is required to submit and the timeline for their submission. The Department may require that this information be provided in a specified form or format to facilitate the analysis and presentation of information for the panel review. Schools will have a minimum of 10 business days to collect and compile the information requested.

Panel Assignment
The Department shall determine the assignment of panel members to particular panels and the schools to be reviewed by each panel. Panelists will be informed of their specific panel assignments at least 10 days prior to the date on which their panel is scheduled to convene. Panelists will be asked to promptly notify the Department if they have any special knowledge of or relationship to the schools or districts their panel is assigned to review that might conflict with their service on that panel and will be reassigned or removed if such a conflict exists.

The Department will designate one member of the panel to serve as panel review chairperson. The panel **chairperson** will attempt to keep the panel's deliberations on track and on time and co-facilitate these deliberations and meetings with the panel coordinator. The panel review chairperson, in conjunction with the panel review coordinator, will prepare a report of the panel's findings and recommendations which will be reviewed by all panel members.

To maximize the panel's time on task and minimize disruption of planned panel activities due to logistical complications, the DOE will assign a staff member/consultant to each panel to serve as **coordinator**. Panel review coordinators will visit the school under review in advance of the panel review date and will work with school and district leaders to organize the schedule, meeting spaces, and other logistics for the panel review. The panel review coordinator will serve as liaison with the school and the district leaders and co-facilitate panel meetings and deliberations with the panel review chairperson. The panel review coordinator will participate fully as a member of the review panel.

The DOE staff who participate in the panel review process as coordinators may, at the conclusion of that process, be called upon to lead or serve on DOE technical assistance and support teams for the reviewed schools.

Presentation of Data and Documents For Study By Panel Members
Prior to beginning its review of a school's performance, the Department will conduct an orientation session for panel members. The panel review protocol and details of the panel review process will be discussed at the orientation. Panel members will be provided with an information packet containing: student performance data, a program and services report, results from a teacher survey and materials submitted by the schools related to their improvement efforts and plans. At the orientation session Department staff will introduce panel members to the materials provided and answer questions about the data or documents that panel members have at that time. Between the date of the orientation session and the day on which the panel convenes to begin the review process, each panel member is expected to study the specific information on the school to be reviewed, formulate initial impressions regarding the school's improvement needs and plans, and identify questions to ask and/or topics to discuss during the review process.

Panel Deliberation on the Quality and Viability of Schools' Improvement Efforts and Plans
Over the course of the panel review process, each panel will spend approximately six hours as a group discussing and deliberating on the improvement needs, efforts and plans of each of the schools they are assigned to review. Time for group deliberation is built into the schedule at several intervals in the process to encourage systematic consideration of the evolving body of information presented for the panel's consideration. (See attached Planned Schedule of Review Panel Activities.)

On-Site Visit
As part of the panel review process each panel will make a site visit of approximately five hours to each of the schools the panel is assigned to review. The on-site visit will afford panel members the opportunity to see and experience each school in operation, observe classes, talk with teachers and students, and meet with the school's principal and instructional leaders in their work environment.

Meeting with School and District Representatives
After completing the school site visit, the review panel will have a meeting with school and district leaders. In addition to the school's principal, the district's superintendent, a representative of the school committee, bargaining unit representative(s), and school council, faculty, parent and student representatives may participate in this session. The purpose of this meeting is for panel members to solicit information from, pose questions to, and engage in discussion with school and district leaders about the school under review. One half hour of this session will be available to school and district leaders for their presentation of information and opinion to the panel.

Panel Findings and Recommendation
During the final hour of panel deliberation on each school reviewed, panel members will be asked to answer, to the best of their ability in light of the information known to them, the two questions which are the focal point for this review:

1. Does the school under review appear to have a sound plan for improving student performance?
2. Do the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

Panel members will attempt to reach consensus on an answer to these questions. The panel chairperson or coordinator will make written note of the panel's judgments on these questions, and will record the key factual findings, impressions, or conclusions on which the panel's judgment is founded. If, after discussion of the information and experiences that give rise to their respective viewpoints, panel members are not able to reach agreement on an answer to one or both questions, the difference of opinion and the factual basis cited in support of each point of view will be noted.

Evaluating the Panel Review Process

When all panels have completed their work, panel chairpersons and coordinators will participate in a scheduled meeting to evaluate the protocol and processes. Panel members will also be invited to contribute, in person or by written submission, to this evaluation process.

Appendix F:

The Massachusetts Parent Involvement Guide

http://www.doe.mass.edu/schcouncil/pubs/2000/pandc.doc

The Parent, Family, and Community Involvement Guide

Massachusetts Department of Education

November 2000

Massachusetts Department of Education
address 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148
telephone 781-338-3000 **internet** www.doe.mass.edu

Massachusetts Department of Education

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Education
Dr. David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Board of Education Members

James A. Peyser, Chairman, Dorchester

Roberta R. Schaefer, Vice-Chairperson, Worcester

Charles D. Baker, Swampscott

Patricia A. Crutchfield, Southwick

Edwin J. Delattre, Boston

Judith I. Gill, Acting Chancellor, Board of Higher Education

William K. Irwin, Jr., Wilmington

Jody Kelman, Concord

Abigail M. Thernstrom, Lexington

David P. Driscoll, Commissioner

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This publication has been produced to assist schools, parents, organizations, and others in the community in the development of educational partnerships.

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Coordinator of Parent and Youth Services, Eastern Massachusetts Urban League

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Former School Committee chairperson and father

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Attorney, member of various site-based management teams at his children's schools, and father of four

Patricia Campbell - Lynnfield
Advisory Council Chair, former Massachusetts President and Regional Vice President of the PTA, teacher, and mother

Laurie B. Castignetti – Braintree
Founder and President of Braintree Partners in Education, School Committee member, and mother of three

Michael A. DeFalco - Brimfield
Vice Chair of Brimfield School Council and father

William Diehl – **Northampton**
Program Manager for several school/community business projects and father of two

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Former School Committee member and mother

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Research Associate, Harvard Medical School, and mother of two

Sharon S. McDonald – Marlboro
Fundraising Consultant and mother

Desiree Parker – Springfield
Middle school para-professional, parent volunteer, and mother

Clifton Reed – Burlington
Former middle school teacher, former Bureau Director, MA Department of Education, and MASSPEP Board member

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Carole Thomson	**Associate Commissioner**

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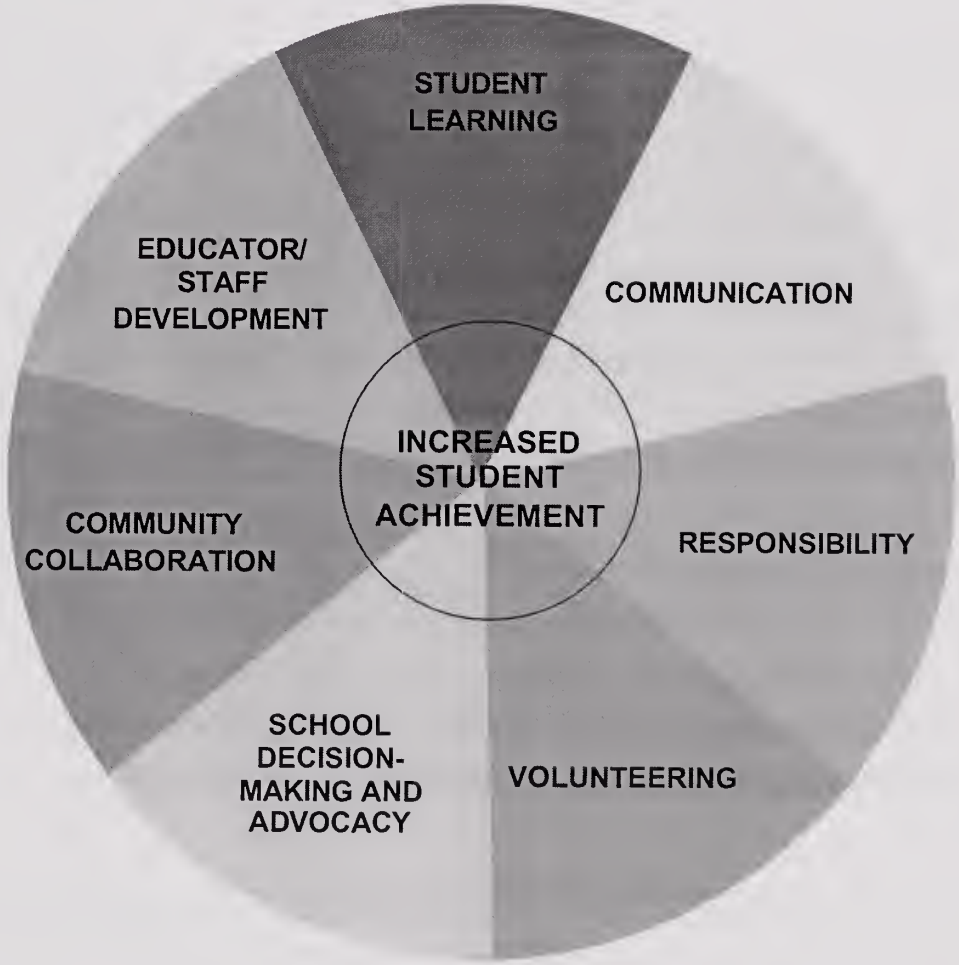
Parent, Family, and Community Involvement Standards for Massachusetts Public Schools



Student achievement increases, schools improve, and parent and community involvement thrives when:

Student Learning	Parents, families, and community members play an integral role in assisting student learning at all grade levels.
Communication	Communication between home and school is consistent, two-way, and meaningful.
Responsibility	Sound parenting practices are promoted and supported.
Volunteering	Parents, families and community members are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought.
School Decision-Making and Advocacy	Parents and community members contribute in school planning and decision making.
Community Collaboration	Community resources are sought to strengthen schools, communities, and families.
Educator/Staff Development	Personnel training (pre-service and in-service) includes courses and workshops on parent, family, and community involvement.

Throughout the document, the word "parent" refers to: custodial and non-custodial biological, step, adoptive, and foster mothers and fathers; grandparents; relatives; and other adults who have a significant role in raising and caring for a child.

Student Learning

Parents, families, and community members play an integral role in assisting student learning at all grade levels.

Rationale

I	Student learning increases when families and the community work as educational partners at home and in the schools and community. At all grade levels, such involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable team for supporting student success. Students, parents, and schools benefit when this involvement continues through high school.
II	As the "big picture" team members in a child's education, families are able to nurture and guide children's learning 365 days a year -- far beyond the twelve 180-day years spent in school.
III	Most parents want to assist their children in learning, but many are not sure what assistance is most helpful or appropriate. Whether working together on a computer, displaying student work at home, or helping to develop study habits, parents' purposeful actions communicate to their children that education is important.

Successful programs:

Provide guidance to families in assisting student learning at home, school, and in the community, and …

a. Inform parents of the curricular goals for students in each subject, at each grade level, suggesting ways to complement and support the curricula outside of school. Advise parents about how they can help students meet individual expectations, find help and support, prepare for standard assessments, and develop skills and habits that promote success and life-long learning.

b. Involve parents in setting student goals, deciding placements and course selections, and planning for post-secondary education and careers.

c. Educate parents about differences in how children learn, particularly with regard to studying, motivation, test preparation, and other factors that impact learning. Offer workshops, printed information, and training as needed.

d. Educate parents about differences in the types and levels of involvement from grades pre-K to 12 and beyond. Help staff understand that parent involvement has developmental stages, too.

Student Learning

Parents, families, and community members play an integral role in assisting student learning at all grade levels.

e. Distribute homework expectations and policies, including guidelines for how families can best facilitate the completion of homework and give feedback to teachers.

f. Assign homework that asks students and their families to interact, thereby increasing parents' awareness of what their children are learning in class.

g. Equip staff with strategies for engaging parents as partners in their children's education. Analyze data to identify successful strategies for reaching various parent populations.

Successful programs also encourage families to ...

a. Sustain a collaborative relationship with their children's teachers in order to stay informed about learning expectations and student progress.

b. Reinforce successful learning strategies, acceptable school behavior, time management, organization skills, and planning. Limit television viewing and computer use.

c. Make reading routine in the home. Share stories\songs with younger children; set reading expectations for older students. Model good reading habits. Make a variety of age\grade appropriate reading materials available at home.

d. Discuss and display student work regularly. Think beyond the refrigerator! (i.e., workplace displays, framed art)

e. Establish a regular time and appropriate space for children to do homework. Offer assistance as outlined by teachers.

f. Convey the benefits of planning, goal setting, and rising to challenge. Celebrate effort as well as achievement.

g. Engage together in educational activities at home, school, and in the community. Be role models for promoting life-long learning and by demonstrating such behaviors as price comparison-shopping, daily reading, and problem solving.

Communication

Communication between home and school is consistent, two-way, and meaningful.

Rationale

I	Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When homes and schools communicate effectively: (1) positive relationships develop; (2) problems are more easily solved; and (3) student achievement increases.
II	Effective home-school communication is a two-way exchange of information where ideas and perceptions are shared. Quality home-school partnerships require: (1) give-and-take conversation; (2) goal setting for the future; and (3) regular and timely follow-up.

Successful programs:

❖ *Foster a school climate that demonstrates to parents that their involvement is welcomed and valued, and....*

a. Invite families to visit and participate through: prominent welcome signs, friendly staff (particularly in the front office), orientations/open houses, school directories and maps, guest books, displays, and print materials.

b. Encourage regular two-way communication between parents and school staff by using a variety of tools such as web sites, e-mail, bulletin boards, newsletters, and home visits.

c. Provide progress reports as well as report cards to parents. Offer follow up conferences as needed and home or community visitation programs for hard to reach parents.

d. Provide clear information to parents (as well as students) about course selections and expectations, extra-curricular activities, student services, testing schedules, discipline codes, and school policies.

e. Celebrate student work in all disciplines through various school displays and programs.

Communication

Communication between home and school is consistent, two-way, and meaningful.

Successful programs also…

f. Post the district and school improvement plan and meeting minutes and agendas (i.e., school committee, school council, and PTA/PTO) via local web-sites, bulletin boards, and newsletters.

g. Facilitate contact between parents and teachers as soon as concerns arise. Encourage contact regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just problems and weaknesses. Provide resources that enable teachers and other school personnel, as appropriate, to communicate with families (e.g., clerical/printing assistance, easy telephone access).

h. Assure that student work is available for family review and comment in a timely manner.

i. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year. Offer scheduling options and accommodations such as translation services, childcare, and transportation, if necessary.

j. Encourage communication and collaboration between various committees such as school councils, PTA/PTO's, and leadership teams. Actively seek input from parents and parent groups on school issues and planning. If a formal parent group does not exist organize one.

k. Translate communications to ensure that non-English speaking parents are fully informed.

l. Provide as much as possible handicap accessibility into buildings and parking areas.

m. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with school administrators about issues of concern. Provide forums on the curriculum and how parents can support their children's learning at home. (Informal sessions such as coffees in parents' homes or community centers might be held by district and school personnel.)

n. Provide adults and students with opportunities to learn together (e.g., family math, science, and technology events).

o. Organize activities (in and out of school) where parents, staff, and community members can get to know one another.

Responsibility

Sound parenting practices are promoted and supported.

Rationale

I	Because a school is student-centered it is an ideal venue for promoting and supporting good parenting practices. Research shows that families exercise authority over key factors that influence educational achievement such as: student attendance, obtaining educational materials for the home, television viewing and/or computer use, monitoring homework completion, using community resources, and providing a healthy and safe home environment.
II	A parent is a child's first teacher, preparing and supporting him/her to be a successful learner. From providing a nurturing home environment to setting appropriate expectations and limits, successful parenting strategies can significantly raise educational performance.
III	Students benefit when schools communicate a respect for a families involvement in education and support the parenting skills required to promote success. This value can be communicated in print materials and displays, thoughtful scheduling, and in what school staff members do and say.

Successful programs:

❖ *View family involvement and the skills associated with supporting student achievement as essential for success. They communicate expectations to parents, and ...*

a. Educate parents about the many ways they can be involved from setting expectations to participation in school events. Schools and the community work to remove obstacles to involvement.

b. Ensure that parents and teachers work together to communicate expectations to students such as regular attendance and homework completion.

Responsibility

Sound parenting practices are promoted and supported.

Successful programs also:

c. Link parents to community and government resources that provide support services to families (e.g. youth organizations, counseling agencies, nutrition programs). Provide parents with opportunities to network and support each other's parenting skills.

d. Establish an easily accessible parent/family resource center (in the school or community) where parents can find information on parenting, child-development, and support services.

e. Partner with community organizations to provide workshops for families. Develop training programs, support groups, and other learning experiences based on input from family surveys.

f. Establish parent-involvement policies and practices that acknowledge traditional and non-traditional families (e.g., changing the salutation on home communications from "Dear Parents" to "Dear Families and Friends").

g. Encourage collaboration between school personnel and parents to find ways to prevent violence, peer ridicule, and other anti-social behavior from occurring in the schools. Work together to ensure that schools are safe environments for student learning and development.

h. Encourage parents to make educational materials such as dictionaries, thesauruses, and calculators available in the home. Partner with the community to acquire materials for families who cannot afford such items.

Volunteering

Parents, families, and community members are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought.

Rationale

I	When parents and community members volunteer in the schools families and schools benefit considerably. Valuable services, including volunteering and in-kind services, are performed by parents each year in the public schools. When schools capitalize on volunteers' expertise and skills they are better able to meet the needs of their students.
II	Volunteers express greater confidence in the schools when they have opportunities to participate regularly and in meaningful ways. They gain valuable insight and satisfaction from their experiences and contributions. Also, by participating in school programs, activities, and events volunteers model attitudes and behaviors about education, communicating a concern about children and their schools.
III	For many adults, it is not possible to volunteer during regular school hours. Before or after school programs, and home and community based activities provide additional opportunities for parents and others to show their support and be involved. Adult participation in learning activities communicates a value for education to students.

Successful programs:

❖ *Utilize volunteers in meaningful ways to reach their goals, and …*

a. Survey parents and community members to identify individuals who are willing to volunteer in the school system. Include questions about volunteers' interests, skills, and availability. Develop a volunteer database and distribute to school personnel and organizations for easy access.

b. Develop organized and coordinated programs for volunteer activities that are meaningful and that match individual interests and abilities.

c. Initiate a reasonable and effective process for screening potential volunteers to ensure the safety and security of the school population.

Volunteering

Parents, families, and community members are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

Successful Programs also:

d. Ensure that alternative volunteer opportunities are available, either at home or through places of employment, for parents and community members who are unable to contribute at school.

e. Provide volunteers with adequate training in the tasks they will perform as well as in school procedures and protocols.

f. Develop communication networks that link volunteers with the school throughout the school year.

g. Recognize the contributions of volunteers through ceremonies, certificates and other methods of appreciation.

h. Design volunteer opportunities for parents with limited time and resources by adopting creative solutions to address the issues of childcare, transportation, language differences, work schedules, etc.

i. Demonstrate an ongoing appreciation for and recognition of volunteers through public ceremonies, certificates, and acknowledgment in print. (These practices often double as vehicles for recruitment!)

School Decision-Making and Advocacy

Parents and community members contribute in school planning and decision-making.

Rationale

I	Schools realize higher levels of student achievement and public support when parents and community members are involved in decision-making and advocacy.
II	Effective parent and community participation in the decision-making process fosters trust, public confidence, and mutual support.
III	Collaboration with parent and community groups bring additional skills, resources, and points of view to support improvement in areas such as curriculum, school safety, support services, and education reform.
IV	Parents and community members can be important advocates for quality education. As partners, they help build public understanding and support. They can also play an advocacy role in the community and in local government.

Successful programs:

❖ *Provide clear and well-publicized information inviting the public to participate in decision making, and …*

a. Work in collaboration with PTA/PTO's and other parent and community organizations to implement the school improvement plan and identify and address issues of importance to parents.

b. Include parents and community representatives on decision-making and advisory committees. Provide adequate training in areas such as the local budget, curriculum alignment, and reform initiatives.

c. Maintain parity between parents and professional staff on school councils [according to GL c.71, s.59(c) of the Massachusetts Education Reform Law of 1993]. Ensure there is a co-chair, and encourage a parent to serve in this position.

School Decision-Making and Advocacy

Parents and community members contribute in school planning and decision-making.

Successful programs also:

d. Provide parents and community members with important information regarding school policies, practices, and student performance data.

e. Ensure that parent and community members have an opportunity for input when planning for school improvement.

f. Treat parent and community concerns with respect. Actively work to demonstrate a genuine interest in seeking resolutions.

g. Educate parents and the community about the roles and responsibilities of school committees, superintendents, principals, and school councils. Encourage parents and the community to act responsibly as advocates for and supporters of quality education for all students.

h. Promote participation at the school, district, state, and national levels to address issues that impact student achievement.

i. Provide training to participants on committees to help them work as effective partners. This training may involve running effective meetings, resolving differences, defining school jargon and procedures, making discussions accessible to bilingual parents and others with limited involvement in day-to-day operations, and ways to actively invite parents to comment on discussions and decisions.

Community Collaboration

Community resources are sought to strengthen schools, communities, and families.

Rationale

I	Collaboration cultivates relationships with individuals and organizations that can support and improve the educational experiences of students, teachers, and parents.
II	Students learn about the realities of the workplace and social responsibility as a result of successful community and workplace partnerships.
III	Community partnerships offer resources that support students and families so that they can focus on learning.
IV	Communities become stronger when schools, businesses, organizations, and individuals become more adept at working together.

Successful programs:

❖ *Provide parents with access to community resources that support the family and student success, and …*

a. Distribute information regarding community services for families such as after school programs, tutoring services, health care, and cultural and recreational events.

b. Develop partnerships that encourage local businesses and service providers to help prepare students for the world of work and civic responsibility.

c. Encourage policies and practices that promote and support individuals from the community to participate in public education.

Community Collaboration

Community resources are sought to strengthen schools, communities, and families.

Successful programs also:

d. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities.

e. Ensure that teachers and school staff have printed information about local adult basic education programs and community resources and services so that they may share this information with families.

f. Work with families and the community to provide safe and valuable after-school/summer experiences for students at all grade levels.

g. Develop formal partnerships with community organizations to receive referrals and/or to provide services.

h. Expand the school advisory council to include community organizations to integrate school planning with local community planning and resources development efforts.

Educator/Staff Development

Personnel training (pre-service and in-service) includes courses and workshops on parent, family, and community involvement.

Rationale

I	Teachers report that parent involvement is a top priority and challenge. When schools provide training for all their staff, including administrators, teachers, and support personnel in parent outreach and engagement, educators work together to employ new ways of involving families in supporting student success.
II	Research studies confirm the strong correlation between effective parent involvement and increased student achievement. When teachers, guidance counselors, and others share best practices in involving parents and other caring adults, students, families, and schools benefit.

Successful programs:

Train educators (pre-service and in-service) to work with parents and other caring adults as educational partners, and....

a. Provide educators with research findings and information on the benefits and modes of family and community involvement, pre-K to 12 and beyond. Include ample opportunity for educators to share best practices and challenges. Be sure to include best practice regarding mentorship and tutoring programs, as well.

b. Help educators develop the skills, sensitivity, and insight necessary to work effectively with parents representing a variety of family structures and cultural backgrounds.

c. Train school personnel in creating an inviting school environment that welcomes all parents and community partners.

d. Provide training on effective parent outreach and engagement strategies, including the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and home.

Educator/Staff Development

Personnel training (pre-service and in-service) includes courses and workshops on parent, family, and community involvement.

Successful programs also:

e. Promote family literacy programs that focus on the family unit, rather than its individual members, as the focus of learning.

f. Offer training to develop strategies to overcome barriers that may prevent parent participation in the schools (i.e. transportation, childcare, low literacy levels, school climate). Increase school personnel's understanding of how differences in parents' literacy levels and cultural backgrounds may impact involvement and student learning.

g. Provide instruction on communication skills, and how to create respectful, positive, and productive parent-teacher conferences.

g. Provide strategies for communicating with parents about their roles in helping their children succeed in school.

h. Present models showing successful school and parent/community partnerships, including methods for building such partnerships. Emphasize effective utilization of volunteer services.

i. Educate staff about community resources and programs (e.g., adult literacy programs, human service agencies, museums, and libraries) and how to connect families with such resources.

j. Promote community partnerships through programs such as intergenerational education, adult mentoring, community service learning, and school-to-career. Involve community agencies in the development of family workshops.

k. Foster an appreciation for involving all stakeholders in school governance and advocacy. Bring staff, parents, and community members together for training in leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and shared decision-making.